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General Assembly

Twenty-fifth special session

Official Records

3rd meeting
Thursday, 7 June 2001, 9 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 9 a.m.

Agenda items 8, 9 and 10 (*continued*)

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Note by the Secretary-General (A/S-25/3 and Add.1)

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Omar Ali Juma, Vice-President of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mr. Juma (United Republic of Tanzania): I would like to commend you, Mr. President, on your election to preside over this special session, which we all hope will have great bearing on the status of global human settlements.

I also avail myself of this occasion, on behalf of the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, to commend the United Nations for organizing the series of meetings which culminated in the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in Istanbul five years ago. I am personally gratified by the opportunity to be the representative of President Benjamin Mkapa, both at Habitat II in Istanbul and now in this follow-up meeting.

The Habitat II Declaration and Agenda constitute a reaffirmation of the commitment to better standards of living within adequate settlements for all people. The United Republic of Tanzania fully subscribes to this ideal, and we have undertaken the following measures in compliance.

First, in conformity with the United Nations campaign towards secure land tenure, our National Land Policy aims at promoting a system that facilitates broad-based social and economic development by all sections of the community without endangering the ecological balance of the environment.

Secondly, the National Human Settlements Development Policy aims at attracting and harnessing existing initiatives in shelter delivery and investment in provision of infrastructure. It seeks to involve various actors in the public, private, informal and community sectors and will guide the rapid urban growth and the transformation of the settlement pattern.

Thirdly, the Government is undertaking a decentralization exercise with a view to strengthening local authorities, which are now considered as very effective institutions of development. A local government reform has been going on for more than five years now. We believe that, under this arrangement, local authorities will be able to fulfil their new role in a world of cities, towns and other

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settlements faced with the challenge of good urban governance.

Fourthly, also in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the Government has made substantive progress through the implementation of the Sustainable Cities Programme, co-sponsored by Habitat and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Under the Programme, the Government is implementing an Environmental Planning and Management approach which seeks to promote partnership and participatory arrangements among city and town stakeholders.

Areas where this approach has been implemented effectively include community infrastructure upgrading, settlement regularization and solid-waste management. The results have been very positive. The programme is now being replicated in all towns in the country. These programmes are being presented at this meeting through the thematic committee. Tanzania is looking forward to sharing experiences and learning from others in this area, so as to better our performance. It is for this reason that I invite delegations to participate in our presentation.

The Government of Tanzania takes a holistic approach to sustainable human settlements. That approach was brilliantly summed up by our retired President Ali Hassan Mwinyi, when he said that poverty and environmental degradation are twins whose mother is ignorance. Indeed, poverty is at the core of unsustainable human settlements. It leads, among other things, to rampant rural-to-urban migration, putting enormous stress on both hard and soft infrastructure.

In this regard, we place the issue of shelter in the context of overall socio-economic development in order to improve the quality of life in both urban and rural areas. However, the implementation of these policies is not without constraints. They include the paucity of housing finance institutions, which calls for development of incremental and complementary forms of soft-terms credit for low-income housing projects; and the expansion of informal settlements, which is a great concern for both central and local Government authorities.

In this context, I therefore urge the international community to recognize the importance of assistance developing countries such as mine in reviving housing financial institutions.

While we are working on the second stage of our economic reforms, namely to translate our recent macroeconomic achievements into tangible national and household income benefits, the need for external assistance can hardly be overemphasized. We recognize, therefore, that enhancing international cooperation is necessary for improving human settlements development. We need to review, for example, the levels of official development assistance. The developing countries are calling for a reversal of the declining trend of official development assistance, to reach the internationally agreed target of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product of the developed countries' economies.

Concerning the external debt problem, developing countries are calling for the immediate and full cancellation of all bilateral and multilateral debts. This should cover both poor countries in the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative and those outside that initiative. This will release resources for the improvement of human settlements in developing countries. It is also very important to campaign for better trade terms, so that developing countries to benefit from international trade.

In conclusion, let me express Tanzania's expectation that this meeting will result in a commitment to enhance the capacity-building of the revitalized Habitat Centre in Nairobi, so that it can contribute effectively to the local initiatives of Member States. Tanzania is proud that this revitalized Centre is headed by one of our most illustrious citizens, Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, whose credentials are widely acknowledged.

With these remarks, I wish this special session successful deliberations.

The President: I thank the Vice-President of the United Republic of Tanzania for his statement.

I give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable George Saitoti, Vice-President of the Republic of Kenya.

Mr. Saitoti (Kenya): The theme of this twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly is the review of the implementation and progress of the Habitat Agenda. The session provides us with the opportunity to share experiences and to chart the way forward in line with the Millennium Declaration.

Kenya would like to reaffirm its full commitment to the goals and principles of the Habitat Agenda. We fully endorse the review and appraisal work that has been undertaken to assess progress and to identify problems and the emerging priorities.

Several preparatory meetings and conferences have been held in various places at the regional and international levels, focusing on monitoring progress and identifying common priority areas. The outcomes of these consultations have provided useful guidance for making decisions in areas for further initiatives. We thus commend the Executive Director and the secretariat of Habitat for the comprehensive report covering the activities over the past five years.

Kenya has made significant progress in creating an enabling environment to deal with social development and poverty eradication. The Government of Kenya has developed the long-term vision for poverty eradication, and that is the national poverty eradication plan, which runs to the year 2015. The plan is being implemented through a three-year rolling poverty reduction strategy that was prepared through an all-inclusive consultative process at all levels.

In the area of shelter, the Government, non-governmental organizations and other partners are addressing the issues of quality of life and safe living conditions in rural and urban areas. Specific initiatives include the dissemination of low-cost building technologies and materials, as well as the implementation of revised building by-laws and planning regulations. Deliberate efforts are being made to deal with the problems of slums and informal settlements. While some slum-upgrading projects are currently being implemented, a major programme for slum upgrading is being developed.

Let me outline some of the challenges that may impede quick realization of the Habitat Agenda objectives.

First, most of our countries are characterized by high levels of poverty. Africa, for example, carries a heavy burden of illiteracy, poverty and disease. Estimates of most human development indicators reveal that development has either stagnated or declined. As we renew our commitments to the Habitat Agenda, we must consolidate our efforts to reverse these undesirable trends.

In this regard, Kenya fully supports the initiative for establishing a global fund to fight poverty that is consistent with the Havana Declaration, and it fully endorses the Okinawa Declaration in which Japan made a commitment of $3 billion to fight poverty.

The implementation of the Habitat Agenda requires additional resources. Yet over the past decade official development assistance (ODA) to developing countries has been declining. Private foreign direct investments (FDI) have, on the other hand, increased substantially. For example, FDI flows to developing countries increased from $31 billion in 1990 to $171 billion in 1998, more than four times ODA assistance to developing countries. Unfortunately, much of this went to only a few developing countries outside Africa.

We therefore urge the international community to honour its obligations as enshrined in the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda by scaling up contributions to the target level of 0.7 per cent of gross national product. Member countries should also work towards creating the conditions necessary to allow increased private financial flows.

The external debt problem afflicts many developing countries, as it affects overall development in several ways. Current estimates indicate that the ratio of debts to exports exceeds 396 per cent. This shows that Africa is one of the most heavily indebted regions in the world. The effects of debt on the provision of infrastructure and other social services, education and health care are clear. Whereas we appreciate and support the commitment of the international community in debt relief initiatives for highly indebted poor countries, its current application excludes several countries.

Africa accounts for about 75 per cent of HIV/AIDS cases in the world. Therefore, we cannot afford to ignore the devastating effect of HIV/AIDS on our development efforts and the demand it creates on scarce national resources. We must take appropriate actions in responding to the effects of AIDS on individual families and communities, including the provision of decent housing to AIDS victims.

To respond effectively to the challenges posed by rapid urbanization in developing countries, participatory planning involving communities, non-governmental agencies and other Habitat Agenda partners is crucial. Well-functioning local authorities must of necessity be at the centre of all these. This

calls for decentralization and the strengthening of local authorities through devolution of power and establishing appropriate fiscal relations with the central Government, based on an agreed formula of tax collection and revenue sharing.

It has become apparent that with globalization the United Nations system will play an increasingly important role in the development agenda of member countries. We must, therefore, recognize that most of the development issues affecting our countries are likely to be considered within the United Nations system. There is need for a shared vision and common strategies to ensure full implementation of the priorities identified.

The President: I thank the Vice-President of the Republic of Kenya for his statement.

I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Makbule Ceco, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of Albania.

Ms. Ceco (Albania): During the last decade, our country has made obvious progress in its road of democracy, civilization and Euro-Atlantic integration. Albanian society has reached important progressive developments and has experienced several dramatic events that have had their impact on the population, especially on the most vulnerable people.

The experience of 10 years of transition in Albania has demonstrated the population's huge support for the values of a democratic system and for the advantages of and possibilities for development through the growth of free initiative and the establishment of political, economic, financial and social conditions for the implementation of international standards for human rights and freedoms. Albanians have supported the democratization and development processes, being conscious of the perspectives they open to the country. They are also well aware of difficulties in achieving such objectives, especially the social cost of implementing economic reforms.

The transition period for Albania has been very difficult compared to other countries of Central and Eastern Europe that have joined the democratization process. This is due to its original circumstances and to the fact that the political class has not always been successful in finding the most efficient means and ways for reformation and development of Albanian society.

At the beginning of the 1990s Albania started to experience urbanization processes and vigorous urban growth. Those processes took place in conditions of slow development. Some of the reasons why our country's urbanization process was a serious economic, social, political and spiritual problem were the very high flow of emigration and internal migration, the deterioration of the health and social services system and the relatively low pace of the reform of that system, along with great economic differentiation and polarization and the consequent social exclusion of several groups within the population.

Turning to the demographic aspect, urban processes in Albania were reflected in population growth in cities and other urban areas. Meanwhile, quantitative urban growth was not compensated for or accompanied by the creation of living conditions in line with urban standards, or by an increase in the role and capacity of political, economic and cultural centres and institutions in urban peripheries. These urban peripheries have been transformed into major enclaves of poverty and problematic demographic growth. Lack of minimum living conditions and a scarcity of necessary infrastructure and of vital social services have been among the main concerns of my Government. The Albanian Government, in collaboration with international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and with the Governments of some neighbouring countries, attaches high priority to the problems caused by uncontrolled urban growth and by internal migration. Recently, the Government has taken a number of legal, financial and institutional steps to solve problems related to the populations of the peripheries of large cities; it will not allow them to be treated as low-rank people.

We are also trying to lay a foundation for the new housing needs of the population based on the spread of urban culture and an urban value system. The quantitative aspects of urbanization are based on legal and economic actions; these will lead to the promotion of qualitative aspects of the urbanization process. We are creating a tradition of collaboration among Government and State institutions on the one hand and civil society, communities and private business on the other. That tradition and those efforts are supported by legal and financial measures.

Urbanization in Albania is a complex process: a combination of in-urbanization and ex-urbanization.

Another significant aspect of the urbanization process is sub-urbanization: the weakening economic impact of rural areas and their transformation — especially those areas in or near the suburbs of big cities — into parts of urban centres or metropolitan structures.

Emerging urban processes involve problems with respect to suitable conditions for settlement of the population. Economic and financial efforts are being made to support the right to human shelter, which is a fundamental human right. Albania is in the process of ratifying the revised European Social Charter and is giving consideration to the financial cost of implementing its standards.

Beyond the problems related to settlement and to the consequences of the economic situation at the beginning of the 1990s, the problems of attaining suitable human settlements are exacerbated by certain specific developments in our country. Apart from its human, political, economic and financial consequences, the collapse of the financial pyramids at the end of 1996 and the beginning of 1997 caused serious problems for the settlement of a considerable number of Albanian families. Compensation for that loss, which has a very high financial cost, is beyond my country's internal resources alone, yet it remains a priority for my Government.

Giving priority to emerging needs of the population that are a result of certain specific circumstances has delayed the preparation of long-term policies for the study and solution of the problems and consequences of uncontrolled urbanization and population settlement. We are moving towards overcoming these emergencies. The Albanian Government has prepared an action plan for its population settlement strategy, which is based on cooperation between central and local government, and among government, civil society, community and private business. The objective of this strategy is not only to support poor groups in the light of the economic, social and health conditions and payment capacities of families and individuals, but also to create conditions and opportunities for the programmed solution of the population's settlement problems.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mel Martínez, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development of the United States of America.

Mr. Martínez (United States of America): It is a great honour for me to be here representing the United States of America. I am the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, a member of the President's cabinet; and I happen to be a refugee to the United States.

The fact that I am a refugee is not so remarkable. The United States is a land of immigrants and refugees who, either searching for a better life for their families or fleeing oppression, came to our shores and helped build our nation. The fact that I am standing here today, however, as head of the United States delegation says a great deal about freedom and the remarkable opportunities offered by participation in a free society.

We call it the American dream, the freedom to pursue success and prosperity, however the individual defines it for himself or herself. But access to housing, equal opportunities in choosing a place to live and the right to own property and pass it on to our heirs are certainly at its core. As nations united through habitat, we share the dream of individuals leading full and productive lives through access to adequate housing, land, credit and basic services. In the five years since Istanbul, we have made remarkable progress towards meeting that goal.

An innovative alliance that brings together local, national, and international resources in Santo André, Brazil, has transformed living conditions and has brought hope to 16,000 residents who live in the poorest areas of that city.

In Thailand, the Government established a unique revolving fund that provides low-interest loans for housing and other community development projects. Today, Thailand's urban poor are building networks and partnerships that are improving the quality of life for residents in 53 of the country's 75 provinces.

My Government applauds those and other efforts that are translating the goals of the Habitat Agenda into real solutions helping real people. I am proud to say that we have also made strides here in the United States since we met five years ago in Istanbul. Today, we have more than 6 million new homeowners, and a record number of Americans have achieved homeownership.

The fundamental right to own property, including a home, is a foundation of our society. Two out of every three Americans own their own homes. We believe so passionately in the cause of homeownership

that every year, we celebrate one week in June — this week, coincidentally — as National Homeownership Week.

Expanding the number of homeowners remains a national priority, because we understand that homeownership is at the very root of good citizenship. It plays a vital role in creating strong neighbourhoods by turning short-term tenants into long-term community stakeholders. In helping families build real wealth, home ownership creates financial security and peace of mind. Home ownership also provides opportunities to build the economic strength of families to help elevate them out of poverty.

Having lived in one country where such opportunities are cherished and in another in which they are denied, I have a special appreciation for the homeowner and I consider the growth in home ownership to be one of the most important economic shifts of the past century. No matter where they live, no matter their income, everyone should have the opportunity to own their own home.

"Everyone" includes women. In the United States, we support without question the equal right of women to own property and to receive or give an inheritance. Most new homeowners did not simply write a check from a personal bank account. They had to finance their purchase. Therefore, access to credit is critical and the first of four cornerstones of the United States housing system. Over the past 35 years, we have enacted a powerful set of laws to ensure that no American who can afford to own a home is denied a mortgage. For this reason, the secondary markets are key — perhaps the key — to success in the housing system.

The federal Government serves as housing's second cornerstone, although its role is specific and appropriately limited. Operating openly and transparently, the federal Government offers a supportive framework within which the housing market operates.

Every citizen has the opportunity to help make the rules at the local level. This is the third cornerstone of the American housing system. Through local elections, their involvement in non-profit groups and public-private partnerships, individuals can help determine the decisions that affect housing in their own communities.

As the fourth and final cornerstone, homeowners and renters have a strong legal system to support them, one that ensures that their rights cannot be unjustly stripped away. While its role is vital, we recognize that Government does not have all the answers or a monopoly on compassion. President Bush is committed to working with community-based and non-governmental organizations, especially faith-based groups, to lift up the neediest among our citizens.

The United States is in many ways defined by the opportunities it affords its citizens. This says something very powerful about the benefits of freedom and maybe it helps explain why the American dream compels us to share the harvests of our opportunities.

Within the next three decades, more than 60 per cent of the world's citizens will live in urban settings, most of them in developing countries ill-equipped to handle the housing needs of so many people. Our urban centres in the United States have faced the problems of inadequate and unaffordable housing and we have decades of experience in creating solutions — not federal Government solutions, but solutions developed *in partnership by local authorities, private enterprise* and community organizations. We are eager to share what we have learned and we continue to reach beyond our borders to form strong partnerships with our global neighbours.

For 30 years, the United States worked with the Government of Chile and its private sector to develop a successful housing finance system. Now, through United States-sponsored conferences, workshops and technical assistance, other Latin American nations are learning how to modernize their finance systems based on this Chilean model.

The continued urbanization of South Asia has brought with it management challenges that my Government is actively helping to solve. We have successfully worked with key cities, such as Kathmandu, to plan for and finance improvements in urban environmental management.

In South Africa, the regional urban development office of the United States Agency for International Development is focused on energy-efficient housing and the need to bring electricity to those who have historically gone without it. Our work has been key in building alliances between national and local Governments and private entities.

These arrangements are hardly one-sided. Over and over again, we have been the beneficiaries when other countries developed urban management improvements and technological breakthroughs. This expertise is invaluable because, for all our progress, challenges remain for this particular nation. We are redoubling our efforts to close the home-ownership gap for minorities, to keep the inventory of federally assisted housing strong and viable and to shelter the homeless and lead them towards self-sufficiency. We are being wise stewards of our natural resources as our cities grow beyond their original boundaries. We are building strong schools, so that no child is left behind in the global, information-based economy.

> "Like stones rolling down hills, fair ideas reach their objectives despite all obstacles and barriers. It may be possible to speed or hinder them, but impossible to stop them."

These are the words of one of my favourite thinkers, José Martí. Despite the obstacles and barriers we sometimes find in our path, my country shares with members of this Assembly a commitment to the fair idea of secure, safe and adequate housing for all. We have made great strides and our progress cannot be stopped, but until democracy and freedom are truly allowed to bring out the best in all the world's citizens, we should not rest.

As we work together in search of answers, let us recognize that solutions dictated by Government will not work on their own. Instead, we must strive to expand self-sufficiency for individuals, to strengthen families and to empower communities to shape their own futures and their own destinies.

This goal is good for our countries, good for the international community, good for every individual who pursues a dream. Let it be our constant guide as we recommit ourselves to fulfilling the Habitat Agenda and carrying out the important work ahead.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mangala Samaraweera, Minister of Urban Development, Construction and Public Utilities of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Samaraweera (Sri Lanka): It is indeed a great honour for me today to have been given an opportunity to make a statement on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka at this special session of the General Assembly.

First, let me extend to the General Assembly at this special session the warm felicitations of the President of Sri Lanka, Her Excellency Chandrika Kumaratunga, who, in keeping with the commitments made at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in 1996, has given topmost priority in our Government's "Vision 21" policy programme to sustainable human settlements development. Let me also take this opportunity to extend our special thanks to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his strong support for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. I would also like to convey our appreciation to Ms. Anna Tibaijuka, the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

We, the States Members of the United Nations, have assembled here to review and appraise the progress made in the implementation of commitments made at Habitat II, to identify the obstacles and emerging issues relating to sustainable human settlements development and to set out future plans of action for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

The Sri Lanka country report, in fact, examines the progress made in the sphere of human settlements development since Habitat II in Istanbul six years ago. The global report presented by the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) has identified the main areas of concern to be addressed at this special session for future action. I am very happy to report to this Assembly that the Government of Sri Lanka has been actively involved in translating the Habitat Agenda into action during the past five years, especially in promoting planned physical and urban settlement development.

The Constitution of Sri Lanka guarantees the right to adequate shelter. Accordingly, necessary policies and legislation have been introduced to facilitate the process of ensuring shelter for all. In order to ensure adequate shelter for all, Sri Lanka is now in the process of increasing its national housing stock through private-public partnerships, by encouraging individual house-builders by creating a conducive social market and legal environment, and by relocating slum- and shanty-dwellers in new sustainable and self-sufficient compact townships.

In the sphere of shelter development, basic guidelines and directions for the country's human settlements development extending over a period of

three decades beyond 2010 have been drawn up. The Presidential Task Force on Housing and Urban Development, which was initiated by the President of Sri Lanka in 1997 and is the first of its kind in post-independence Sri Lanka, has prepared a comprehensive plan for human settlement development at the national, provincial and local levels.

In fact, the urban population of Sri Lanka at present constitutes 30 per cent of the country's total population. It is likely to reach 45 per cent and 65 per cent by 2015 and 2030, respectively. Taking into consideration the trend in Sri Lanka's urban population growth, the Government has undertaken an extensive physical development plan for the next 30 years within the overall context of its national economic development strategy.

Also, the issue of substandard housing is one of the most serious development challenges faced by us in Sri Lanka today, as will most probably also be the case in the next decade. For instance, 51 per cent of Colombo's total population lives in slums and shanties, while only 42 per cent of the national housing stock is permanent. Therefore, improving the quality of the national housing stock, ensuring security of tenure, providing urban infrastructure, developing the capital and secondary housing markets, mobilizing public-private partnerships in shelter development to ensure sustainable human settlements, developing human resources and strengthening local authorities, including the empowerment of civil society, are some of the major challenges that Sri Lanka needs to address today.

To work on the shelter problem of the slum- and shanty-dwellers in Colombo — who, as I mentioned earlier, represent half of that city's population — an innovative, fully market-based, self-financing, voluntary rehousing programme with the full participation of the private sector and the community — which has been called a sustainable township programme — is being implemented. This imaginative programme will offer the urban poor an option to trade off the unencumbered land on which they live without a title for a modern apartment constructed within a compact township. This programme, which is already under way, envisages the construction of 50,000 such units by the year 2005. In addition to the sustainable township programme, the urban settlements improvement project and other supplementary plans are being implemented to target under-served settlements within the city of Colombo. The enabling shelter development programmes are also being promoted in other urban and rural areas and in the fisheries and plantation sectors, with a view to providing adequate shelter for all by the year 2010.

Sri Lanka believes that there must be a greater global partnership for cooperation in the fields of financial and technical assistance to strengthen the capacities of the developing countries so as to enable them to cope with the growing problems pertaining to human settlements development in an ever-urbanizing world. The real challenge before us in the urban millennium, if I may use a phrase utilized by the President in his opening address yesterday, is to demonstrate our political will to establish effective institutional mechanisms to implement the measures agreed upon here. But the political will of the developing countries will be reduced to a mere slogan unless the same will is mobilized within the developed countries to ensure a fair and regular flow of assistance to developing countries in order to achieve the common objectives of the Habitat Agenda.

On behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka, let me emphasize that we are committed not only to implementing the Habitat Agenda, but also to consolidating our common mission with all the Member countries who are looking forward to a new order for ensuring international cooperation in the context of the rapidly expanding urbanization and globalization process.

In conclusion, I hope that the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly will be a great success.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. José Badia, Government Councillor for Public Works and Social Affairs of Monaco.

Mr. Badia (Monaco) (*spoke in French*): As President of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, Mr. President, you are also presiding over this special session devoted, in accordance with resolution 53/180, to a review and overall appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. This pleases us, because we are aware of and appreciate your abilities.

The current review and evaluation of the decisions of the Habitat II Conference in which we are engaged and which, we are certain, this special session will carry out successfully, should be an opportunity to

confirm with conviction and strengthen the commitments the international community undertook at Istanbul in June 1996. As stipulated in paragraph 7 of the Declaration adopted on that occasion,

> "As human beings are at the centre of our concern for sustainable development, they are the basis for our actions as in implementing the Habitat Agenda."

The authorities of my country, which is a city-State, unreservedly share, and are concerned about, the universal objectives set out in the Istanbul Declaration, which are aimed at making human settlements safer, healthier, more liveable, more equitable, more sustainable and more productive.

First of all, the Government of the Principality of Monaco would like to pay tribute to the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements for its work, and to congratulate it on its numerous and productive activities. The recently launched campaign in Nigeria, to which we wish every success, is an encouraging and enlightening example of that work.

His Serene Highness the Sovereign Prince of Monaco has always wanted the modernization of housing in the Principality not to overlook the social dimension, while integrating the principles of sustainable development at all levels through precise and careful management of the environment.

The Principality of Monaco has unique experience in the area of human settlements because of the major obstacle to its expansion posed by the smallness of its land area. For that reason, as it has developed economically, it has been compelled to promote a model of human settlements that is adapted to these conditions. This is often costly, and our human settlements are sometimes partially or totally built on land reclaimed from the sea. Its housing is likewise imbued with a social and humanitarian character.

In order best to satisfy the growing demand for housing, the Government of the Principality has, when it is not itself taking such action, for several decades encouraged the construction, in limited areas, of new functional buildings that are well integrated into the environment and that are equipped to counter the seismic danger to which the region is subject.

We now have over 80 public housing units out of every 1,000.

Because of the large number of tenants in the Principality, there exists a system of financial allowances that enables the neediest to have access to housing for which the rent is very moderate, regardless of the quality. If they wish, the elderly and handicapped can receive, regardless of their income, special housing facilities with medical support. Some recently constructed buildings consist of specially designed housing intended to enable the elderly to stay in their homes.

In addition, recent legislative measures make it easier for the State to intervene in protecting tenants from private landlords.

Another major concern guides the authorities of Monaco: maintaining the quality of and constantly improving public infrastructures, in particular the green spaces that now occupy more than 20 per cent of our land area. City cleanliness also receives constant attention from the public authorities, who are provided with substantial technical means to collect household and industrial waste on a daily basis and to maintain thoroughfares and areas for walking and leisure.

The work done to preserve air quality also deserves to be underlined. This involves maintaining a regular flow of road traffic to the extent possible, improving public transport, reducing pollution produced by motor vehicles and focusing continuous efforts on creating greater public awareness. Experimental initiatives have also been taken in this regard, such as the granting of a government subsidy to firms that use utility or commercial vehicles powered by electricity.

The treatment and evacuation of waste water has improved since the 1980s, thanks to a biological purification plant. The sludge from this plant is burned in the Principality's incineration plant for household waste. To inform the public of this initiative, as well as of the considerable costs linked to de-polluting waste water, it was deemed appropriate to indicate on water bills the amount applicable to this treatment technique.

The Government of Monaco has not confined itself to work carried out at the local or national level. In 1998 the Principality joined the World Alliance of Cities Against Poverty. This international programme reflects the priorities on our agenda, and Monaco accordingly wished to make a financial contribution to it, the main objective being to improve living conditions in urban areas, particularly regarding

housing and the promotion of controlled strategies for urban development.

Through this programme, my country has also started to develop concrete bilateral cooperation with three cities that are members of the Alliance: Cotonou, Dakar and Essaouira. It is determined to continue and to strengthen this type of cooperation by expanding it to other cities and continents in the future.

Please be assured, Mr. President, of the strong interest and unqualified support the Government of the Principality attaches to this session, which, thanks to your great ability and the dedication of the members of the Bureau, will, we are convinced, be crowned with success. We hope that this special session will give rise to substantial progress, in particular through international action, to enable us to approach the goals set in Istanbul five years ago at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements: the eradication of poverty and better living conditions for all.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Bates Namuyamba, Minister of Local Government and Housing of Zambia.

Mr. Namuyamba (Zambia): On behalf of the Zambian delegation, I wish to join other delegations that have spoken before me in congratulating you, Mr. President, on being elected to preside over this important special session of the General Assembly for an overall review of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). You can count on Zambia's active participation in the proceedings of this special session.

Today I stand here on behalf of the people of Zambia to reaffirm Zambia's continued commitment to the Habitat Agenda. We believe that the Habitat Agenda provides a vision for improving the quality of life of people throughout the world.

Our experience over the past five years of implementing the Habitat Agenda has revealed the comprehensiveness of the Agenda. Virtually any good urban development activity somehow finds a niche in it. It is this fact that makes the overall review of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda an interesting experience. We all have tales to tell and lessons to learn, developed and developing countries alike.

Over the past five years we in Zambia have endeavoured to realize through various development programmes and projects the two themes of the Habitat Agenda: adequate shelter for all and the development of sustainable human settlements. In the field of shelter, we have made significant strides by empowering the Zambian people with their own houses. We have formulated and are implementing an innovative housing policy that has enabled sitting tenants to purchase houses that hitherto were owned by Government, local authorities and State-owned companies. As a result, the status of many Zambians has been transformed from tenant to landlord, virtually overnight.

Perhaps I should mention here that the Zambian housing policy was awarded the 1996 Habitat Scroll of Honour by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

Our housing policy has not neglected the poor in our society. In addition to empowering our people in the conventional or formal housing sector, we continuously empower our people living in unplanned settlements by providing them security of tenure for their properties, including title to land.

For almost 30 years now, we have given people living in recognized informal urban settlements titles to the land and have allowed them to gradually build their houses. In 1974, we enacted a law, the Housing (Statutory and Improvement Areas) Act, which provides the legal basis for their security of tenure.

Our approach to adequate shelter for all and the development of sustainable human settlements has stressed the importance of community participation. Indeed, the Habitat Scroll of Honour was awarded to Zambia in recognition of the participatory and innovative manner in which we formulated the housing policy.

Experience has shown us that community participation in shelter and human settlements development engenders civic responsibility at the local level and enhances a sense of ownership regarding public projects carried out by the community.

We have also learned that if participation is to be effective, participants themselves must be enabled to participate. Zambia therefore supports the enabling strategy that underpins the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. When we talk about enablement, we are referring to capacity-building at all levels — local, national, regional and international.

In our assessment, the degree to which an activity of the Habitat Agenda is effectively implemented is dependent on the enabling environment created for it. The implementation of the Habitat Agenda is dependent on the enabling strategy created for it at all levels.

We are of the considered view that enablement is the entry point for implementing the Habitat Agenda. Consequently, while we wholeheartedly support the notion that the primary responsibility for implementing the Habitat Agenda rests with each State, we are also of the considered view that an enabling environment is essential at the global level if Member States are to effectively implement the Habitat Agenda.

How can Member States effectively implement the Habitat Agenda in an environment of overburdening external debt and poverty in which access to the international market is restrictive and the requisite new and additional resources for its implementation are not available?

The Habitat Agenda itself is full of recommendations about what needs to be done at the international level to ensure its effective implementation. We support these recommendations, and we believe that the international community also supports them. If they are not supported, commitment to the Habitat Agenda will become academic. It is our hope that the globalization that is taking place now will be part of the enabling process, rather than a process that stifles and overwhelms local initiatives.

Zambia supports all efforts aimed at strengthening the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) so that it can effectively play its assigned role in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. We therefore welcome the appointment of Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka to the position of Executive Director of Habitat. She brings to the Centre a wealth of experience which will enhance its performance. It is our hope that the Centre will now begin to receive the necessary financial support that it deserves through predictable and adequate funding to support its activities. We are also aware of initiatives by regional and other international organizations supporting the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. In this regard, we wish to welcome the initiative of the Commonwealth.

Finally, let me reiterate Zambia's commitment to the Habitat Agenda and our resolve to implement it within our limited resources.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Djéjouma Sanon, Minister Delegate for Habitat in the Ministry of Infrastructure, Habitat and Town Planning of Burkina Faso.

Mr. Sanon (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): It is a great honour and privilege for me to address the General Assembly at the twenty-fifth special session, on human settlements. I should like, on behalf of the Government of Burkina Faso and my delegation, and on my own behalf, to express sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, and his colleagues, in particular the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). On a more general level, I should also like to pay a well-deserved tribute to the entire United Nations system, including Habitat, and in particular to the preparatory committee, whose painstaking and conscientious work made possible the convening of this special session.

There is no need to point out the importance of this meeting. It provides an opportunity for the international community to proceed to an overall review and assessment of the implementation of the decisions taken at the Istanbul Conference five years ago.

In accordance with the commitments made at Istanbul, my country, Burkina Faso, has been working on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Our participation in the various preparatory processes reflects the commitment of my country's highest authorities to making the Habitat Agenda a framework for cooperation and exchange.

Providing adequate housing for all and developing sustainable human settlements are the primary objectives of the Habitat Agenda as far as my country is concerned, and I am pleased to be able to inform the Assembly about the progress that we have made.

With regard to housing and habitat, Burkina Faso, assisted by Shelter Africa, has embarked upon a programme for the construction of social housing. The first phase of the programme to promote and popularize the use of local construction materials — a programme known as LOCOMAT — which aims to provide greater

access for low-income sectors to decent housing and better living conditions, has just been completed. That programme, undertaken with assistance from the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, has proved very satisfactory, from the scientific standpoint as well as in terms of its contribution to the construction of affordable housing. Those results encouraged us to request Habitat to become involved in the implementation of the second phase of the project.

Generally speaking, the issue of financing remains the stumbling block in our urban policies. We believe that this special session should help to remove that obstacle.

Good governance is necessary if we are to build a prosperous, responsible and cohesive society. Burkina Faso is therefore steadfast in its commitment to promoting a democratic way of life by ensuring political pluralism and respect for human rights as well as enhancing the participation of women in political life. Burkina Faso encouraged greater participation on the part of women in the local elections held on 24 September 2000, through advocacy work in favour of women with traditional religious and political authorities, and by increasing the awareness of political parties so as to achieve better representation of women in elections. That has made it possible to significantly increase the number of women elected to municipal councils; their presence has risen from 9 per cent in 1995 to 21 per cent in 2000.

Significant progress has also been made with the adoption of a statute on municipal employees and the organization of national and regional workshops, as well as of special workshops on decentralization strategies.

With regard to social development and poverty eradication, Burkina Faso has drawn up a framework document on combating poverty, which spells out the main objectives for the next decade: health, education, the construction of rural roads and the promotion of women.

This framework document, which was approved in 2000, was based on the work done by the Government since the adoption in 1995 of the Letter of Intent on Sustainable Development Policy and on the results of broader consultations held with all sectors.

Our goal is to create a favourable environment for the promotion of economic growth and to better enable people to participate effectively in bringing about and benefiting from such growth, with the emphasis on increasing their income and providing them with better access to basic social services.

My country is taking part in this special session, confident — indeed, convinced — that our work will have a positive outcome. Burkina Faso hereby endorses the commitments and recommendations to be made by the participants at this very important session.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Farouk Bal, Minister of State of Turkey.

Mr. Bal (Turkey): It was a great honour for my country to host the Habitat II Conference five years ago in Istanbul. It is my honour and privilege today to address this distinguished assembly on behalf of Turkey at this important occasion.

The Habitat Agenda adopted in Istanbul offers us a sound guideline. Thanks to the Agenda, we are witnessing many positive initiatives in the field of housing and greater efforts directed at the sustainable development of human settlements. Indeed, we are happy to see that the spirit of Istanbul is still with us. In that spirit civil society has been recognized as a key actor and the very special role local authorities have to play in achieving the goals set by the Habitat Agenda has been recognized. We are pleased and gratified to see active and increasing participation on the part of our Habitat partners and welcome their important contributions.

People from the Government and municipalities, from the private sector and non-governmental organizations, have come together in nearly 50 provinces of Turkey to develop and put into practice this agenda, in recognition of the key concept of partnership. We are preparing for the next stage of putting the governance concept in place.

It is our hope that, before we reach Istanbul+10, Turkey and many other countries will have undertaken the necessary legislative steps — steps that would establish the legal basis to enable civil society to participate in decisions which affect people's lives and environment.

The Turkish Constitution states that every person has the right to live in a healthy environment. It is incumbent upon the State, therefore, to take the necessary measures to meet the housing needs of its

citizens. There is no discrimination whatsoever among the citizens with regard to ownership and inheritance. Indeed, the existing legal framework saved us from stumbling into legal obstacles in implementing the Habitat Agenda. Moreover, the level of development and capabilities enjoyed by Turkish producers enabled us to remove many bottlenecks faced in the past on the supply side of the equation.

However, besides mentioning these important advantages, I should remind the Assembly of the high rates of urbanization in Turkey. As a result, providing housing, along with the necessary infrastructure and services, has remained a top priority in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. I am sure this is a situation we share with others that have similar high rates of urbanization.

Ensuring more access and providing affordable houses is another priority. Unfortunately, we had to pursue these priorities against the background of major natural disasters. We had to build nearly 42,000 prefabricated shelters and as many permanent ones. We are grateful for the solidarity shown by the international community, Governments and non-governmental organizations alike. This support contributed greatly to our timely relief work. Indeed, I cannot stress enough the importance of international networking, as highlighted in the Habitat Agenda.

There is no doubt that in an increasingly interdependent world, achieving the goal of adequate shelter for all is a noble aim. This also means that we have to provide our cities with better infrastructure and better social services. This is also necessary for attracting investments in this globalizing world. Moreover, we should not lose the richness of local culture in the process.

In building our habitats, we should be sensitive to diversity and to sustaining biological diversity. In this respect, the dimension of regional and international cooperation is important. The similarity of our problems should lead us all to cooperate more. This is another reason why we think that the decision of Habitat to establish a regional office in Istanbul is a very significant step. Turkey will be proud to host this regional office. We are looking forward to the finalization of this project.

Before I conclude, let me highlight the vital importance of strong political will in achieving the goals of the Habitat Agenda. The Government of Turkey is resolved to continue to take part and contribute to this long but rewarding process. After all, these goals represent nothing less than our common aim of achieving a brighter and secure future for mankind.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Momodou Nai Ceesay, Secretary of State for Local Government and Lands of the Gambia.

Mr. Ceesay (Gambia): The Government of the Gambia has always strongly believed that housing is a special consumer good, a major engine for economic growth and a key component of social welfare. The Gambia was among the signatories to the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda during the 1996 second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements held in Istanbul. It will be recalled that the main themes of that important summit were: adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlement in an urbanizing world. The Government of the Gambia remains fully committed to the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda, and we will endeavour to ensure the successful implementation of our National Plan of Action.

As a result of the prevailing demographic trends and urbanization, the means of meeting the demand for decent housing are proving increasingly elusive. The long-term objective of the housing sector will be to increase the production of decent housing stock on a more regular and sustainable basis. Particular attention will be focussed on the difficult and inadequate access to land for housing, dependence on imported building materials, the manpower and technical limitations of the construction industry, and the need for specialized housing finance institutions, such as housing banks and housing cooperatives.

It is estimated that by the year 2020, two thirds of the world's population will be living in towns and cities. This situation is of great concern to African Governments, especially in the context of the severe shortages in housing and infrastructure, increasing environmental and employment problems and the growing ineffectiveness of administrative systems. It is in this context, therefore, that the Government of the Gambia believes that due attention must be given to the following issues in order to effectively redress the shelter problem.

The first issue is the decentralization of resources and services, including housing facilities, to keep people in their localities.

In this regard, the Government of the Gambia has undertaken an unprecedented programme of decentralizing local government to ensure participatory decision-making at the grass-roots level and is also embarking on a rural electrification programme covering all of our major towns and villages. At present, over 80 per cent of the rural population h..ve access to clean drinking water.

Secondly, with over 75 per cent of the building materials imported, the Gambia can solve its housing problem only by popularizing the use of alternative building materials.

Thirdly, no development effort is feasible without adequate financing. This is why we have decided to establish a Housing Finance Bank in the Gambia, and work in this area is progressing satisfactorily. Meanwhile, private sector initiatives have led to the establishment of housing finance windows in two of our commercial banks.

It must be pointed out, however, that without the necessary climate of peace and stability, all these efforts will bear little fruit. This is why we believe that good governance, which guarantees peace and stability, must be the guiding principle. We have all witnessed the many wars and civil strife across Africa over the years. Such a state of affairs has hampered the continent's ability to achieve the goals of the Habitat Agenda and the Istanbul Declaration. We are simply destroying more shelter than is being provided in replacement. Such cases abound virtually all over Africa. In order to ensure greater peace, we must promote regional cooperation. In this way, we can facilitate and build trust and greater understanding among ourselves.

The Gambia Government believes in the full and progressive realization of the right to adequate housing and will continue to provide housing for all its citizens in the form of mass housing projects. There is equal access to land for both males and females. This policy is upheld by both the Government and the Social Security and Housing Finance Corporation (SSHFC) in the allocation of plots of land.

The current government policy on human settlements is to increase open space in settlements. Policies and programmes being pursued at present include the creation of green areas and other areas of environmental and cultural significance. Since the Habitat Conference, an unprecedented number of services and elements of infrastructure, such as hospitals, telecommunications, roads and schools have been made more accessible throughout the country.

The Government accords priority to the development of the private sector as a vehicle for achieving sustainable economic growth. Our investment policy provides a broad-based, attractive incentive structure for potential investors. This includes the removal of obstacles and red tape that hamper the growth of the private sector.

In conclusion, taking a cue from and in consonance with our constitutional provision, "The Gambia incorporated vision 2020", we aim, among other things, to encourage participatory governance and balanced development. The Government of the Gambia will continue to pursue and intensify a comprehensive political and institutional decentralization process. This will contribute to poverty alleviation and diffuse the *different socio-economic tensions that result from rapid* population growth, rural-urban drift, unemployment and regional disparities in economic development.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Al-Khussaiby, Secretary-General, Ministry of National Economy of Oman.

Mr. Al-Khussaiby (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Secretary-General Kofi Annan for inviting us to participate in the important deliberations of this Conference that aims to achieve the lofty ideal of securing healthy habitat and safe and sustainable human settlements for all. I would also like to thank the President of the General Assembly and wish him every success.

My country's Government realized the importance of human settlements at the time the international community attached importance to the idea. After the holding of the first Habitat Conference in Vancouver in 1976, we adopted the first long-term development strategy for the period 1975-1995. We started establishing housing policies, structural and urban policies for our towns and cities at the beginning of 1996 — that is, at the time of the Istanbul Conference — and also started implementing our Second Development Plan, "Oman 2020". We have concentrated on that strategy, which is the

improvement of the living conditions of the people, not only through policies that aim to achieve economic growth but also through the reduction of development disparities between regions and between income categories.

Through our two strategies, we have tried to secure the following achievements: first, to provide everyone with decent housing, especially those with low incomes; secondly, to adopt comprehensive planning for our land in order to determine the population's habitat needs, while giving the private sector a greater role in this endeavour; and thirdly, to adopt the necessary criteria in town planning, especially while planning for new areas of human settlements and for expanding existing ones. In the framework of all these plans, we have tried to strike the necessary balance.

Pursuant to the Istanbul Declaration — that is, in order to ensure the participation of all social groups, for them to enjoy shelter and to adopt a participatory approach — we have, in implementing the Habitat Agenda, endorsed the principle of participation of civil society through the establishment of local committees and local authorities. These policies and measures adopted by my country over the last 25 years have been successful, as can be seen from the various statistics submitted in our country report to the special session.

My Government believes that just human settlements simply mean giving affordable shelter to all, without discrimination and with all the necessary requirements. This is precisely why, at all levels and with the participation of universities and civil society institutions, we have highlighted the fact that all the ideas enshrined in the Istanbul Declaration will be implemented through the various legislative and socio-economic policies.

Habitat is an international issue, as are human settlements. This is why we believe that the world is responsible for these two issues. Therefore, we have to adopt an international approach to solve the problems facing us and to improve the social, environmental and economic conditions prevailing in human settlements. For this reason, we would like to express our concern as to what is happening in the Palestinian-occupied territories with reference to the illegal Israeli settlements, because the continued settlement policy there creates further conflict, and this is a very negative development.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Robert T. Molloy, Minister of Housing and Urban Renewal, Department of the Environment and Local Government of Ireland.

Mr. Molloy (Ireland): The problems of urbanization are common to all participating countries, and the Habitat Agenda is of crucial importance to all of us in our national land use, environmental and housing policies.

The Habitat process, through the mechanism of national reports, affords and encourages a sharing of ideas, experiences and innovative and varied approaches to these issues. The five years since Istanbul have been remarkable for my own country, as this period has coincided with the most sustained and intense period of economic growth that Ireland has experienced for many decades. Irish cities, and Dublin in particular, have been the engine rooms of this economic success. However, this has brought new pressures. Our National Habitat Report reflects the sheer pace, scale and fundamental nature of the responses that have been required to meet these new challenges.

A major focus of the Habitat Agenda is the need for cooperation between all partners, be they national or local government, community and voluntary groups, or employers and trade unions. Our recent experience has demonstrated that such partnership is vital to building the consensus required to achieve social, economic and sustainable growth.

This partnership approach is embodied in a national agreement: the Programme for Partnership and Fairness. Its key aims are to underpin Ireland's competitiveness and develop economic prosperity on a sustainable basis, while enhancing the quality of life in the context of a fairer and more inclusive society. For example, the Irish Government has established a National Housing Forum, where all the social partners can make a direct contribution to housing policy formulation.

There is also an emphasis on the development of local governance initiatives, through, for example, Local Agenda 21, aimed at maximizing the involvement and participation of local communities in the democratic process. This includes the identification of targeted interventions in areas where cumulative disadvantage is acute and also the encouragement of

economic and social development in rural communities.

We have embarked on a major programme of local government reform which endeavours to encourage openness and transparency at both the political and administrative levels and involves community and local groups. New County Development Boards have been established to formulate strategies for a more integrated approach to local government and local development, and to ensure a more coherent service delivery system at the local level.

The Government is committed to achieving more balanced development throughout the whole country. We are preparing a National Spatial Strategy, with the objective of ensuring that the regions have a greater share of economic activity in the years ahead. At the same time, it will deal with the problems of congestion arising from the growth of the greater Dublin area. Thus the strategy, which will take a long-term perspective — over a 20-year period — should contribute to the improvement of the quality of life for communities throughout the country.

The development of a comprehensive National Anti-Poverty Strategy framework has been one of the most important areas in which the social partnership approach has facilitated the enhancement of equality through the elimination of poverty. This 10-year strategy recognizes poverty eradication as a vitally important issue in the public policy context.

Each participating country must devise policies and mechanisms to deliver on the broad principles that are being discussed here. The provision of adequate shelter for all is a central component of Irish social policy and will continue to be at the heart of how we deliver on the principles enunciated at Istanbul and which are being reaffirmed in the draft Declaration. The Irish Government has launched an integrated strategy to comprehensively tackle homelessness. This recognizes that homelessness is increasingly a symptom of social problems that cannot be addressed solely in a housing context. A comprehensive approach involving both shelter and support to enable homeless persons to reintegrate into society is required.

We have also established a new statutory framework to meet the accommodation needs of travellers. Local authorities are obliged to draw up, adopt and implement a five-year programme to meet the accommodation needs of travellers in their areas. This includes addressing their specific needs through, for example, the provision of halting sites.

The issue of overseas development aid has engendered significant interest and debate here at this special session, and we fully recognize its importance. At last year's Millennium Summit, Ireland gave a solemn undertaking that we would reach the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance by the year 2007. Ireland is on target to meet our commitment, which will see our national development assistance programme increase fourfold by 2007. Indeed, by 2003, Ireland will increase spending on official development assistance by 102 per cent over the level in the year 2000, to reach $469 million, the largest ever increase in our national official development assistance budget. This rate of expansion is without precedent for any donor.

I have tried to touch on some of the key areas which are of relevance to my Government in delivering on the key Habitat objectives. This process has provided an invaluable opportunity to forge a new vision for the years ahead.

While the problems are formidable and overcoming them will test our resolve and ingenuity to the full, we have seen that, when faced with what had seemed insurmountable problems, communities, municipalities and governments have risen to the challenge. I am convinced, therefore, that we will succeed in giving effect to the principles outlined in the draft Declaration and ensure a better future for all.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Herivelona Ramanantsoa, Minister of National and Regional Development, Environment and Town Planning of Madagascar.

Mr. Ramanantsoa (Madagascar) (*spoke in French*): It is a signal honour for me to take the floor today at this special session of the General Assembly devoted to the question of human settlements. As the representative of Mr. Didier Ratsiraka, President of the Republic of Madagascar, it is my duty to transmit to Secretary-General Kofi Annan his deep regret at not having been able to attend this special session, due to time constraints. Indeed, our country is in the midst of putting in place the final elements of our decentralized structure: the autonomous provinces.

However, by sending a large delegation that includes many authorities who are working in the field in the human settlements sector, our Government wishes to make clear our deep interest in the objectives set for this world summit on human settlements.

In this respect, Madagascar would like solemnly to pay warm tribute to the initiators of this special session. We would like to convey to you, Mr. President, and to the members of the organizing team our sincere gratitude and our deepest appreciation.

Following the 1996 Istanbul Conference, Madagascar, like other countries, launched a national human settlements policy geared, in its initial phase, to finding ways and means of resolving the immediate problem: insufficient housing units. At that time, our national stock of residential buildings showed a deficit of several hundred thousand housing units.

We thus started to implement our policy by gathering together all of those involved in human settlements — public and private real estate promoters, both national and foreign; banks and insurance companies; manufacturers of local building materials; artisans and so on — and focusing them on the goal of constructing 35,000 housing units within five years. In addition, in order to promote do-it-yourself building, the Government is making housing more available to low-income households by offering them the possibility of acquiring a 200-square-metre plot of land for a very low price under an innovative programme called "one household, one plot of land".

At the same time we have been thinking about the future of our nation's human settlement problems, relying on fresh demographic data that shows a population growth rate in towns of 5 per cent, which is much higher than the national average of 2.8 per cent. At this rate, in the next 15 years, 35 per cent of the population of Madagascar will live in towns and cities. Sixty rural communes in the first category, the former sub-prefectoral centres, now undergoing urbanization, will have become secondary towns.

Urbanization is relentless. This movement is the result of a transition to a trading and industrial economy, of rural migration and of natural population growth. In fact, urban development can no longer be seen separately from rural development. The evolution of these two goes hand in hand and follows an interdependent logic. Towns and countryside are now dependent upon one another and independent of the ups and downs of the foreign market. The towns are becoming reception centres and service centres for the rural population, as well as centres for grouping, processing and marketing regional produce.

Thus, the analysis of the roles of towns in the socio-economic development of the country and land structuring, as well as the study of poverty in urban areas, has led us to formulate an urban programme to prevent poverty. Worked out through a participatory process among many partners and through consultations in the field, the approach to this programme involves project coordinators, associations, urban and rural town halls of the first category, ministries and funding sources. This process has identified four strategic goals: urban governance, conditions of life and human settlements, economic development at local and regional levels, as well as urban social integration. These four goals are the main lines of the action plan that will be implemented by 103 urban areas in the national urban system, ranging from small centres undergoing organization, secondary towns, regional capitals and the national capital.

There will be a strengthening of the capacity to manage and plan the development of partnerships with local authorities in the state. As far as the living environment and housing settlements are concerned, there will be an attempt to improve the conditions for the poor and make it possible for them to acquire land, housing and basic services. The point here is to include neglected districts and to raise the level of infrastructure, as well as to develop financing mechanisms, while also looking ahead to a gradual extension of cities.

With regard to the plan for local and regional economic development, the point here is to develop the capacities of firms, stimulate trade between regions and towns and to facilitate the emergence of regional economic poles.

With regard to urban social integration, there will be greater socio-economic inclusiveness for the poor and an attempt to promote their sense of citizenship and their participation in the benefits of growth, as well as to guarantee the protection of persons and property.

In implementation of this programme, needs and priorities have been expressed by type of town or city by their mayors during field consultations. To fine-tune these priorities, consolidate the process of partnership and enhance its sustainability, it is proposed that this

structure should involve both local authorities and the State, and lead eventually to the establishment of a State-town contract.

Distinguished delegates, the holding of this special session has come at the right moment for our country in that the challenges connected with urban development in our national strategy to reduce poverty call for the essential support of our development partners if they are to be realized and fruitful.

To conclude, we would like to repeat our complete commitment to the new directions advocated by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements under the leadership of Madame Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, centred around two major themes: security of residential occupation and good urban governance.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Mr. I. M. C. Chombo, Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing of the Republic of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Chombo (Zimbabwe): Like any developing country, Zimbabwe is faced with problems, but our determination to implement the Habitat Agenda is unquestionable and some significant strides have been made in this endeavour.

We see the team spirit created by the establishment of our National Habitat Committee as a major strategy to the reduction of the housing waiting lists that exist in every urban centre of Zimbabwe and to assist in the provision of shelter in the rural areas as well. The key responsibilities of our Habitat Committee are to facilitate, coordinate and promote activities of all stakeholders who want to participate in the provision of shelter.

Some progress has been made in the provision of shelter for the citizens of Zimbabwe, even though our national housing backlog still exceeds one million. My Government is moving away from the role of being the direct provider of housing to a facilitating role. We are encouraging and facilitating the provision of housing through a number of approaches that involve the participation of local authorities, the private sector, donors and the beneficiaries themselves, in partnerships that enable the pooling together of resources and skills. These approaches have resulted in more than 100,000 new houses being constructed since the Istanbul Conference in 1996.

The Committee has produced the National Housing Policy, which has been approved by Government and is now our framework for further advancement in ensuring that every citizen in Zimbabwe has a decent place to call home. This policy document is a product of wide consultations and as such is enjoying national ownership and support that goes beyond Government circles.

In line with our facilitation role, our Government has embarked on a process of decentralization, particularly of centrally controlled urban land and infrastructure. While carrying out the process of decentralization, we are duty-bound to ensure that the local authorities are capable of handling the new powers and responsibilities entrusted to them. We are therefore undertaking a capacity-building exercise in our councils, and I am happy to announce that some pleasing results are being achieved.

Zimbabwe is constantly looking for innovations in building technology and regulatory systems. We are also encouraging local authorities to investigate, experiment with and test alternate building materials and methods of service provision. This has required a paradigm shift but we are seeing some favourable results, although some failures have also been experienced.

We in Zimbabwe are not only concerned about urban housing, because the majority of our people live in rural areas. My Government has embarked on a major land reform programme that has drawn a great deal of international attention.

The land reform programme is not just about the redistribution of land. It includes the provision of basic infrastructure, shelter and inputs to enable the farmers to thrive and to improve their lifestyles. Owing to the magnitude of the land-reform programme, we are going to experience a major change in the settlement patterns in our country. The construction of 200,000 new homes for people who have for years been deprived of access to agricultural land and who have suffered from the resulting poverty is a major challenge. I would like to take this opportunity to call upon the progressive international community to join us in our efforts to address imbalances and facilitate a decent lifestyle for all our people.

As I have already stated, we are decentralizing power to local authorities and have made it easier for them to provide basic infrastructure. We envisage the

development of small urban centres rather than the urban sprawl associated with large cities. My Government has already set up a system of tax benefits for investors in these small centres.

Members will agree with me that in order for the Habitat Agenda goals to be achieved, the requisite financing should be made available. As set out in paragraph 26 of the draft Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium,

> "domestic resource mobilization as well as sound national policies are crucial for financing shelter and human settlements". (*A/S-25/2, para. 26*)

Further, the Habitat Agenda requires Governments to strengthen existing financial mechanisms and to develop innovative approaches for the financing of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

In this area, my Government, together with the private sector, is spearheading the establishment of the secondary mortgage market as a means of mobilizing domestic financing. New legislation is being actively considered to bring new players, such as pension funds, insurance firms and banks, into the area of shelter development. The capacity-building programme being run by my Government is encouraging local authorities to participate in capital markets. Credit-rating agencies have now been set up to rate those local authorities that want to borrow on the open market.

Despite those efforts, we will always have a shortfall of resources. At the eighteenth session of the Commission on Human Settlements, I pointed out that Africa has some of the world's poorest countries. Paragraph 50 of the Habitat Agenda calls upon developed countries to strive

> "to fulfil the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of ... gross national product ... for official development assistance". (*A/CONF.165/14, annex II*)

In line with that provision, I implore the first world to appreciate our position and to support the World Bank's Special Programme for Africa by funding initiatives by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and by providing financial support for United Nations agencies dealing with the problems of Africa.

I want to assure participants that we will not cease to strive to ensure that the right to shelter enshrined in the Declaration is a reality in Zimbabwe. It is constantly said that the world is a global village; we certainly want our part of the village to be made up of decent, environmentally friendly and affordable houses which are owned by their occupants, and not the shacks that are so often associated with the third world.

I appeal to all participants to think about future generations. They will be able to give us credit and honour only if we leave behind a decent living environment. This session should give us a blueprint of hope and should create a sense of urgency. I wish all of us fruitful deliberations as we endeavour to set a firm foundation for the future.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Francis Babu, Minister of State for Works, Housing and Communications of Uganda.

Mr. Babu (Uganda): I have the honour and privilege to address the Assembly at this special session on behalf of the Uganda Government. Uganda participated fully in the regional meeting which took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in November 2000, and my Government subscribes to the Addis Ababa Declaration on Human Settlements in the New Millennium. In that Declaration, African Member States reaffirmed their commitment to the Habitat Agenda endorsed in Istanbul 1996 in the areas of adequate shelter for all, sustainable human settlements, enablement, all-inclusive participation and gender equality and mainstreaming, among other areas. Uganda looks forward to seeing the major elements of the Addis Ababa Declaration incorporated in the final declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium, as they offer useful and proactive guidelines in our resolve to better our human settlements.

Like any other developing State Member of the United Nations, Uganda has faced a number of challenges and constraints in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. These include: poverty and unemployment, which negatively affect and incapacitate most households in their efforts to improve their housing conditions and quality of life; and institutional weakness caused by inadequate capacity at all levels among stakeholders. Despite all those constraints and challenges, we have endeavoured to implement the Habitat Agenda. In that connection, Uganda urges other Member States to ensure that poverty eradication and debt relief form the core of the

declaration. All other aspects of the Declaration revolve around these two.

A hungry man is an angry man. Democracy, good governance, shelter for all, and all the paraphernalia of family values will not be realized if people are hungry. We are all aware that sustainable development is another key element of the Habitat Agenda. The Government of Uganda attaches the highest priority to poverty eradication. We have adopted a comprehensive poverty eradication action plan and have established a poverty action fund, along with many other programmes to empower people and to improve household income for all.

There is a dire need for our development partners to enhance support for poverty eradication by contributing the internationally agreed target of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product. Currently, my country's entire public investment plan is tailored to eradicate poverty. This has so far resulted in a relative reduction of poverty levels. That reduction has been possible due mainly to macroeconomic stability and adherence to economic reforms undertaken by the Government since 1986. As a result, Uganda has qualified for and has accessed debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative.

Because of its experience, Uganda fully advocates full debt relief for developing countries under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative. Conditionalities on debt relief should be relaxed.

Uganda appreciates the overriding centrality of land and land tenure for human settlements and for development in general. As Charles Abrams said long ago, "the surer the land tenure the deeper the building". I am proud to say that Uganda's Constitution has vested ownership of land in the hands of the citizens of Uganda. It recognizes all the different tenure systems under which land is held, including customary land tenure and freehold tenure. In addition, the new Land Act of 1998 grants security of tenure to former squatters on land they have occupied for 12 years or more.

With regard to governance, Uganda has fully embraced decentralization and democratic governance. The Local Government Act of 1997 provides a legal framework for the operationalization of decentralized governance. The Government has fully decentralized executive and legislative powers, as well as powers to make fiscal decisions. It is in the process of gradually devolving the development budget.

Governance is critical to sustainable human settlements development. Within the framework of the policy for governance based on decentralization and enabling policy on housing, community-based organizations have been empowered to plan and implement, on a self-help basis, shelter and human settlements development programmes.

On management of the environment, the National Environment Management Authority has been set up and its statute empowers it to oversee all matters of environmental concern in Uganda. The concept of public-private partnerships for urban environment is being introduced in Uganda with the help of the United Nations Development Programme and is aimed at improving basic services and infrastructure. Uganda commends this public-private initiative and there is commitment to implementing it as a measure towards improving the living environment in the country.

We trust and believe that this time our wishes and commitments in the whole process of Istanbul+5 will be fulfilled and that all stakeholders will play their part in ensuring that we forge ahead with the proposed future initiatives. Before I finish, let me be like Oliver Twist and ask our development partners for more so that we can achieve the Habitat Agenda.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Sheikh Khalid Bin Abdulla Al-Khalifa, Minister of Housing and Agriculture of Bahrain.

Sheikh Al-Khalifa (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to speak in my capacity as the head of the Bahrain delegation to the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly for the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

It is my pleasure to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election as President of the General Assembly at this session and I wish you success in this important undertaking. It is also my privilege to convey to you the greetings of the leadership of modern Bahrain.

Bahrain is witnessing a political democratic development wherein human rights, freedom of expression and parliamentary participation are being further strengthened. This movement towards

democratic reforms has been initiated by the Emir of Bahrain, His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa. The people of Bahrain have, with an overwhelming majority, voted in favour of the National Charter.

The State of Bahrain has over the past five years participated effectively at the national and regional levels in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. This is clearly reflected in the Bahrain country report. Realizing the importance of and need for regional cooperation, especially within the Arab world, Bahrain hosted the Arab regional meeting in preparation of Istanbul+5, one important output of which is the Manama Declaration.

The Manama Declaration clearly reflects a unified vision of the participating Arab States with regard to the course to follow towards sustainable human settlements development within the Arab region. In the Declaration, a great number of important special references are made, including to the close and integral relationship between sustainable development and quality of life. We trust that the content of the Manama Declaration will be reflected in the Istanbul+5 declaration.

Bahrain and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) have a long history of close cooperation, direct and indirect. This close cooperation has resulted in a number of joint programmes, including the establishment of the Bahrain Urban Indicator Programme and the Bahrain National Urban Observatory. The development of a sustainable urban development strategy has been planned for the near future.

Mr. Shihab (Maldives), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We wish on this occasion to compliment the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) for the excellent work it is undertaking at the global, regional and national levels, especially in Bahrain, and to express our appreciation for the choice of Bahrain as one of the States where the Global Campaign for Good Urban Governance will be launched. We will continue to support the Centre and its programmes.

As a State Member of the United Nations and its agencies, and recently as member of the Commission on Human Rights and the economic and social development Committee, Bahrain would like to reiterate the high importance it attaches to actively participating in conferences, sessions and meetings organized by international organizations in a wide variety of different fields, including in the area of human settlements. In this connection, Bahrain took part at the global level in the Vancouver Conference in 1976 and in the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul in 1996.

At the regional and global levels, Bahrain has participated in World Habitat Day and in the Arab Housing Day that was celebrated by Arab housing ministers to affirm that housing is tantamount to stability and a safe environment.

At the national level, the State of Bahrain has taken progressive steps in the area of human settlements, in particular since the creation of the Ministry of Housing and Agriculture in 1975. The programmes and activities of Bahrain are guided by the principle of providing adequate housing for every family that does not own or cannot afford to build such housing. This principle has been embedded in the Constitution of Bahrain, which affirms that the State shall provide housing for those with limited income.

On this basis, since 1975 the Ministry of Housing and Agriculture has very successfully undertaken multiple housing programmes and projects. As a result, approximately 62 per cent of the population are at present supported by these programmes. The Government of Bahrain has provided needy families in difficult circumstances with housing and other social services, in addition to assistance given through the Emiri endowment for social care. These programmes and facilities, under the leadership of the Emir of Bahrain, are in line with the recommendations and resolutions of the United Nations, in particular those of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

We look forward to the success of this session in laying the foundations for providing each family and each individual with a life of dignity in a society whose present and future well-being is secure.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Abdol Alizadeh, Minister of Housing and Urban Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Abdol Alizadeh (Islamic Republic of Iran) (*spoke in Persian; English interpretation furnished by*

the delegation): The five-year review of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) held in Istanbul should provide us with a unique opportunity to take stock of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, evaluate our accomplishments and the obstacles encountered along the way, identify current and emerging challenges and seek further initiatives and actions to meet them. The only rationale for this review session is to be able to build upon the past and move ahead.

First of all, I take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS/Habitat) for all their good work, including the preparation of very useful guidelines for country reporting.

As for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, over the past five years we have initiated a number of actions and measures aimed at making the process sustainable. Let me just draw attention to some of the lessons learned in the process.

First, as underlined at the regional preparatory high-level meeting, access to land alone does not suffice for shelter provision. Following 20 years of experience, a shift at the level of national policy from the mere provision of land to the provision of housing has been effected. Secondly, the shift in the shelter provision policy has been accompanied by a more pronounced emphasis on private sector activity and contribution, whose positive impact at the national level is quite discernible.

Thirdly, formulation and implementation of the "rent-to-own" plan for young couples and female-headed households has proved to be a useful and popular policy with a bright future; fourthly, increasing access to credit for youth and the poor by supporting specialized non-profit, non-governmental funds and credit institutions; fifthly, enhancing the role of community-based organizations as effective enabling institutions for the provision of housing; sixthly, creating an integrated and coordinated system of urban and rural management in order to control and guide the process of urban development and the activities of the agencies responsible for the provision of infrastructural services and facilities; and finally, emphasis on the elimination of monopolies, promotion of popular participation and civil society and activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the enhancement of private sector investment and the promotion of the role of local Islamic councils.

On the promotion of local governance, I should add that in early 1999 free democratic elections were held across the country for local, town and village councils, thus taking a major step towards the effective decentralization of decision-making, partnership and participation in implementation of policies.

Let me now just draw attention, very briefly, to some of the major current and recurrent problems facing the international community. First of all, I should say that I agree with you, Mr. President, that we are at the beginning of the urban millennium. But, let us not forget the almost totally neglected rural millennium, particularly in the developing world.

Worse than the rural plight is the precarious situation of refugees, an unfortunate persisting phenomenon of global dimensions and one also requiring an urgent global collective response. The plight of refugees and the homeless can hardly find a more telling example than that of the oppressed Palestinian people. We believe this important international gathering on human settlements must, by its very rationale, take a very strong position in denouncing the Israeli policy of systematic destruction of Palestinian homes and simultaneous expansion of settlements in occupied Palestinian territories.

Speaking here as the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, I can only end on a positive note and state that the paradigm of dialogue among civilizations, thanks to President Khatemi, provides the most appropriate framework and conduit for the promotion of a higher level of universal understanding and effective international cooperation. It is only through cooperation, based on dialogue, at all levels that the international community stands the chance of achieving the objectives of the Habitat Agenda and the present review Conference.

I thank you very much, Mr. President, and wish you and the Bureau every success in leading the Conference to an outcome rising to the challenge of the moment and the situation.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Nguyen Tan Van, Vice-Minister, Ministry of Construction of Viet Nam.

Mr. Nguyen Tan Van (Viet Nam) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me, on behalf of the delegation of the

Government of Viet Nam, to extend greetings to all representatives at this special session of the General Assembly on human settlements.

Housing has been recognized as a basic human right of the individual and represents a primary concern in the daily life of all from every strata of life. Viet Nam is a nation of limited land and is densely populated, with a developing economy and harsh climatic conditions. All those factors force the Vietnamese to save to improve their shelters, thereby contributing to the increase of the housing stock.

Taking into consideration the role and the importance of human settlements within the country's economic and social development process, the Government has clearly focused efforts and attention on resolving housing problems, especially by building settlements in urban areas, as expected, in order to be able to meet housing demands in the face of the rapid urbanization in recent years.

Since the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul, great and positive changes have been achieved in human settlements development in Viet Nam. The Government of Viet Nam is applying a policy of abolishing the housing subsidies system and is pointing out all housing possibilities to the population, especially in urban areas.

The State has focused special attention on a series of policies, aimed inter alia at the rehabilitation of the machinery for the housing investment policy for development, the promotion of skilled labour to participate in settlement-building, the privatization of State settlements, the authorization of priority investment for building settlements in urban areas, the facilitation of land acquisition for settlements and others. These policies have brought about positive changes in Viet Nam's housing sector.

During the past five years nearly 39 million square metres of new housing were built; 75 per cent of those dwellings were built with the private capital of the population. The average living space per capita reached 8 square metres in 2000. The Government pays special attention to building shelters in areas affected by floods and cyclones and to improving the environment along canals in urban areas and industrial parks.

The Government is encouraging the construction of apartment buildings in cities to satisfy the requirements of middle- and low-income residents. We attach great importance to such construction, which is taking place in accordance with land-use requirements and the demands of population growth.

However, the fact that residential units are in short supply and 10 million square metres of housing are in poor condition continues to be a major challenge in Viet Nam. This is a particular problem for low-income housing in the big cities and in rural areas where there are often floods and cyclones.

Many housing units in urban areas have been built by individuals themselves. The infrastructure of much of this housing is inadequate, and there are no controls for the preservation of the environment and its natural beauty. In addition to increasing housing stock, therefore, the Government of Viet Nam and the urban authorities will be taking priority measures to resolve the problems associated with unplanned and uncontrolled housing construction.

Housing policy is closely linked to other social policies, such as eliminating hunger, reducing poverty and creating employment, all of which are designed to promote social equality. Taken together, housing construction and environmental reform will stimulate healthy growth in the housing market and contribute to the development of the national economy.

Poor and low-income residents need to be accorded priority assistance in the area of housing. In order to stimulate all aspects of the economy, including foreign investment in the housing development sector, the Government will be developing a policy to make conditions more favourable for investment in housing construction and to accord it greater priority.

Over the next five years, the urban population will require an additional 60 million square metres of housing, which will help to increase it to an average of 10 to 12 square metres per person. Viet Nam has begun to implement a economic and social and development strategy for the period 2001-2010, and a five-year plan for the period 2001-2005. We are open to relations with all countries and international organizations on the basis of equality in cooperation and development.

In the area of housing development, the Vietnamese Government is committed to creating favourable conditions for foreign investment in Viet Nam. I should like to take this opportunity to express our hope that we will soon receive the valuable

assistance offered by Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and individuals throughout the world in support of the economic and social development of Viet Nam in general and of its housing development in particular.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Ileana Tureanu, State Secretary, Ministry of Public Works, Transportation and Housing of Romania.

Mrs. Tureanu (Romania): In assessing progress towards the fulfilment of the Habitat Agenda commitments and strategies, the Government of Romania wishes to present to the special session of the General Assembly the status of the implementation of its national programmes and actions.

The Istanbul Declaration underlined the importance of placing housing development issues in a sustainable perspective. Through the concurrent implementation of various policy measures, therefore, the Government of Romania is committed to supporting the sustainable development of human settlements and to increasing the ability of all stakeholders to mobilize resources towards resolving housing issues.

The major policies and actions of the Government are focused in two main areas: continuous legislative activity in support of the sustainable development of human settlements; and enhancing the role of the Government as facilitator and catalysing factor in the development of the housing sector.

The medium-term strategy of the Government of Romania reflects the close links that have to be established between the sustainable development of human settlements and an accelerated reform process aimed at achieving a well-functioning market economy. The overall framework of such an approach is provided by Romania's National Programme for Spatial Development. The specific programmes and policies spelled out in the national plan concentrate on the major issues that require government measures to be taken in order to achieve the overall goals of socio-economic reform and the sustainable development of human settlements. They relate to the main transport infrastructure, water management, areas of cultural and natural heritage, the network of human settlements and the prevention of natural disasters.

The documents of the national plan have been adopted by the Parliament of Romania as framework laws, and they represent guidelines for action for all relevant actors at the central and local levels, orienting both government programmes and private investment in the various fields. The network of human settlements is of special concern for the Government of Romania. As important economic and social changes are being brought about through reform, the restructuring and remodelling of urban and rural settlements is crucial for improving the living conditions of their inhabitants.

A comprehensive analysis of human settlements, based on 30 indicators, revealed the challenges that require priority attention. These include the need, first, to increase the polycentric character of the network of cities by reducing the disparities between the capital city, Bucharest, on the one hand, and other towns and municipalities on the other; secondly, to enhance the role of small- and medium-sized towns in the surrounding area, with a view to providing higher-quality social and community services throughout the territory; and thirdly, to arrest the further decline of living conditions in rural areas and set a positive course for economic and social development, through better infrastructure and public services.

A special section of the national plan is dedicated to the prevention of natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods and landslides. It is stipulated by law that local government, together with specialized institutions, must identify and map risk-prone areas, and must take special planning and technical measures to protect settlements and families from the consequences of natural disasters.

Housing ranks high on the agenda of the Government programme for the next four years. After a decade of economic and social reform, it is widely recognized that housing is an important sector of the economy and makes a substantial contribution to gross capital formation. It is also a key factor in the development of human settlements and in ensuring social stability and the well-being of individuals and families.

The basic attitude guiding government action is its commitment to achieving a competitive market economy. This commitment is reflected in the main principles of Romanian housing policy. These are the better definition of the role of the State in facilitating the development of market mechanisms and in ensuring

the functioning of an efficient housing market; facilitating access to the market for all the actors involved in the development of the housing sector; and providing a safety net for the neediest. The National Strategy for Housing for the next four years, developed by the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Housing, aims at mitigating the burden imposed by the relationship of the market price of housing to the average family income; facilitating access to the market for specific categories, especially young individuals and families; providing incentives for private investment in housing; and enhancing the role of the National Housing Agency as a developer and a loan-funding institution.

We note with satisfaction that our priorities and concerns are well reflected and included in the declaration that will be adopted by this session. Romania reaffirms its commitment to continue implementing the provisions of the Habitat Agenda and to take part in the international cooperation in this very dynamic field, thus further benefiting from support and assistance for carrying out its national programmes.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sergey Kruglik, First Deputy Chairman of the Committee of the Russian Federation for Construction, Housing and Municipal Economy.

Mr. Kruglik (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The delegation of the Russian Federation would like to emphasize the importance of this special session of the General Assembly as an event symbolic of international cooperation in the sphere of sustainable development of urban and rural human settlements. We see the main goal of this forum as being an objective appraisal of the progress achieved in implementing the decisions of the Istanbul Conference on human settlements and the elaboration of agreed upon approaches for further international efforts to ensure sustainable development of human settlements.

While acknowledging the successes achieved by a number of countries in this field, we cannot ignore the persisting and in some cases intensifying problems. The accelerating process of globalization has considerable potential for accelerating economic and social development; it also may increase the danger of the marginalization and further exclusion of those countries that cannot integrate themselves into it. As the Millennium Declaration states, our central challenge is to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all peoples and States. Our work today should make a profound contribution to the attainment of this noble goal.

In its human settlements policy the Government of the Russian Federation guides itself by the provisions of the Habitat Agenda adopted in Istanbul as a long-term plan. The two basic priorities of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development are being put into practice.

In Russia, the right of citizens to housing is guaranteed by the Constitution. According to fundamental laws, the poor and several other categories of citizens are provided with housing either free or at affordable prices. The right of private property in Russia is protected by the law. Over the last few years a series of laws and decisions of the Government were passed to ensure social and legal protection of the ownership of housing of citizens, including minor members of the family. The reforms in the housing sector undertaken in the 1990s are an integral part of Russian Federation economic reform. The existing legislative framework regulating housing and municipal sectors is being improved. As a result of the reforms, by the end of 1999, about 60 per cent of the housing stock in Russian was privatized. Most people of the country became owners of their homes, and a housing market began to be created.

The Government is taking all possible measures to ensure the interests of the most vulnerable, socially unprotected and poorest populations. A programme of focused social assistance is being implemented in the form of subsidies for the payment of housing and utility costs. Today about 73 per cent of the population of Russia live in cities, and the improvement of urban governance and development is one of the major priorities. After the Istanbul Conference, we started to actively implement the international system of urban and housing indicators for monitoring urban development. To this end, urban monitoring stations are being established.

Among the most important objectives in the area of sustainable human settlement development is ensuring the sustainability of urban infrastructure systems, including public transit systems. In addition, serious attention is being paid to the improvement of the functioning of local self-government bodies to strengthen the social infrastructure of human

settlements — that is, education, health care, social protection and other services.

Russia is going through a difficult period of large-scale market reforms, which creates additional problems for the achievement of the objectives set in the Habitat Agenda. In this situation, international cooperation is of special significance, offering us an important source of support for our efforts. In this context, we would like to emphasize the fruitfulness and usefulness of our cooperation with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, which is the main organization of the United Nations system in this field. The projects implemented in Russia with the assistance from the Centre for Human Settlements have enhanced the effectiveness of our efforts in such fields as improvement of urban governance, management of the housing stock, and municipal infrastructure, among others.

We believe that the work of the Centre for Human Settlements and other organizations of the United Nations system in the interests of the countries with economies in transition should be continued and developed. We consider that the priorities of such work should include further improvement of housing legislation, establishing legal bases for ensuring popular participation in the organization of local self-government, the reform of the management of the housing stock and the municipal economic infrastructure, the organization of national and local monitoring stations, the adaptation of forward-looking international experience to the conditions of countries undergoing market reforms, and the development of innovative models for mobilizing additional resources, including private sector resources, for sustainable human settlements programmes.

In conclusion, let me express confidence that this special session will enable us to achieve real progress towards the achievement of the goals of the Habitat Agenda in the new millennium.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Tomaž Kancler, State Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of Slovenia.

Mr. Kancler (Slovenia): Let me start by expressing, on behalf of the Government of Slovenia, great appreciation for the initiative and enormous work done by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and by the regional centres in promoting and encouraging a worldwide effort to improve the quality of life in human settlements. We believe that these efforts will contribute to forming a more solid basis for sustainable development and mutual cooperation, with the common goal of a better quality of life. This work is furthermore setting up a suitable framework that is helping to define spatial-development policy measures to accomplish these goals, taking into consideration the principles of democracy and human rights. Slovenia welcomes and supports these efforts with great enthusiasm and high expectations.

Slovenia has already aligned itself with the statement delivered yesterday by Minister for Housing of Sweden on behalf of the European Union, and we subscribe to it in full. I would like to take this opportunity to also briefly present some of the most important achievements in the process of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in Slovenia, as well as the priority goals for further actions to achieve sustainable development.

In the five years since Habitat II, Slovenia has made significant steps in the design of a new spatial-planning system, particularly in searching for administrative solutions so as to adapt the legal system of the country, including adapting to a market economy, a democratic system and the establishment of local government. At present, significant efforts are under way towards improving spatial-planning legislation with an emphasis on land policy, and towards preparing the new spatial plan of Slovenia, which is setting an overall strategy for spatial development. Slovenia incorporated the Habitat Agenda recommendations in the process of the preparation of its spatial plan, which — along with the National Environmental Protection Programme and Economic Development Strategy — is one of the main strategic documents oriented towards sustainable development. The main principles of the concept, in terms of a better and sustainable quality of life, are, among others, the rational use of land, protection of the natural and cultural heritage, social cohesion and, of course, economic development.

The characteristics of our country also give rise to specific problems that we encounter in the development process. Slovenia is a Central European country of about 20,000 square kilometres, with a population of roughly 1.9 million people living in slightly less than 6,000 settlements. It is marked by an

extremely varied landscape and a large number of small urban settlements. These characteristics are reflected in the uneven economic structure, polycentric development, dispersed settlement structure and distribution of population.

Within the context of the spatial development strategy, we stress the priorities of achieving a balanced urban structure and urban network; the effective management of urban growth; balancing the housing market; and improving the land and real estate policy.

First of all, countries with small cities have a specific position within the larger spatial context. We have to deal with the development of strategies that define the role of small cities within large-city networks. As easy as it is to achieve balanced structures within the small-city networks, it is a greater challenge to find their place, in terms of cooperation and competitiveness, in relation to larger European cities. Special attention also needs to be focused on managing the outward expansion of towns and cities. This creates new urban structures — for example, suburban areas — that are also the consequence of land and real estate policies that remain unsettled.

Secondly, it is also very important for Slovenia to establish balanced land and real estate markets, especially to ensure the better provision of housing. Processes like privatization and denationalization are slowing down the development of these markets, supported by good land and real estate policy. Therefore, we have to dedicate ourselves to making a special effort to solve these complex problems. One of our most important needs is to modernize the land administration and information system in order to ensure land availability for development.

Slovenia has already set out an outline for the implementation strategy of the Habitat Agenda — the National Programme for the Implementation of the Habitat Agenda — in the Slovenian national report on Habitat II. We also set a number of priority objectives.

My country is implementing sustainable developmental goals as a priority in all of its new strategic documents and has undertaken the implementation of the Habitat Agenda commitments as a continuous process.

We will also continue to actively support sustainable and balanced spatial development by presiding over the European Conference of Ministers Responsible for Regional Planning until 2003, and we will continue to emphasize the quality of human settlement development. In the spirit of these endeavours, activities are going to be organized to promote an integrated approach to spatial development planning, to promote the implementation of the guiding principles for sustainable spatial development of the European continent, and to prepare proposals for common projects which will promote international and interregional cooperation in sustainable spatial development efforts.

I am confident that this continuing spirit of cooperation, along with a clear political commitment and awareness of the common goals of all nations, as agreed upon in the Habitat Agenda, will allow us to achieve better solutions to the complex problems we all face, as well as to achieve sustainable development and, most of all, a better quality of life. Slovenia is prepared to continue to work towards the Habitat Agenda commitments, and in this spirit it fully supports the adoption of the draft declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency U Tint Swe, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Construction of Myanmar.

U Tint Swe (Myanmar): It is an honour and a privilege for me to address this twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly on behalf of the Government of the Union of Myanmar.

The convening of this special session for the overall review and appraisal of the Habitat Agenda offers us a unique opportunity to review our country's efforts in human settlement development and to set new priorities for sustainable development.

Our participation in all the substantive sessions of the preparatory committee for the Istanbul+5 process and the regional preparatory meeting in China have increased our awareness and understanding so that we can tackle the problems of urbanization in this new millennium.

Against the background of the Asia-Pacific region, which is rapidly urbanizing, Myanmar's urban population of 14 million out of 50 million people is still low when compared to that of neighbouring countries. Major cities and towns are geographically balanced throughout the country. As Myanmar's

economy is based on agriculture, rural development is the priority sector of the national economy.

Considerable success has been achieved in our efforts to improve our people's living standards through building a physical and social infrastructure, in transport, education and health facilities, with a view to developing all regions equally, closing the gap of development between hilly regions and the plains and narrowing the development gap between rural and urban areas.

In the shelter sector, the Government has adopted different strategies for the provision of land and housing. Alternative strategies were implemented in such areas as urban expansion, relocation of services and redevelopment schemes.

The role of the Government in the housing sector has changed from that of housing provider to facilitator and regulator, thus allowing the private sector to share the Government's role in providing housing needs through various means. One of the success stories in squatter upgrading schemes was the introduction of "hut to apartment" projects within the squatter areas, whereby the squatters were accommodated in the allotted apartments after completion of new construction.

As part of the government policy to eradicate poverty in the rural areas, equal opportunities are being provided in such areas of need as provision of health-care facilities, schools, creation of employment opportunities, improved access to drinking water and road construction.

In the area of urban governance, the Government has successfully implemented a series of decentralization initiatives that include the formation of a Yangon City Development Committee and a Mandalay City Development Committee, under the direct supervision of the Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council and the Prime Minister. In order to implement development tasks in other major cities and towns, including border areas and rural regions, a new Ministry has been formed to cater to the needs of these regions.

The Government of the Union of Myanmar is endeavouring to raise the living standards of the people, in both urban and rural areas. In this regard, the development of rural areas plays an important role. Our Government emphasizes the harmonious and complementary development of rural and urban regions, with the ultimate aim of the emergence of a peaceful, modern and developed nation.

Over the period from 1988 to the present, we have witnessed the successful cooperation and participation of the private sector and community-based organizations in building safe and sound settlements that are socially and environmentally sustainable. We are aware that we have common concerns in tackling the problem of urbanization. In the process, the unique problems peculiar to each subregion, and especially to each individual country, should also be addressed.

In this new millennium, the greatest challenge for all of us will be the development of sustainable human settlements. Here, the key institutional challenge remains capacity-building at the township level, where the understanding of local needs and conditions will be the prerequisite for effectively carrying out the development mandate.

We are fully confident that this special session, through our sharing of knowledge and learning from each other's success stories, will produce recommendations that will lead to concrete actions in improving the quality of life in cities and human settlements.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Erwin Ortiz Gandarillas, Chairman of the delegation of Bolivia.

Mr. Ortiz Gandarillas (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of my delegation and on my own behalf, I should like to convey to Mr. Harri Holkeri my warmest congratulations on his election to preside over this twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly.

First of all, we should like to highlight the importance of this session in the framework of the process of implementation of the Istanbul agreements. We must now assess the situation and review the achievements that have been made as well as the difficulties and obstacles that we have encountered along the way and that remain to be overcome, above all in developing countries. But we also must consider the outlook for the efforts that we are making.

This review and appraisal should take place in the context of a comprehensive approach, taking into account the various aspects and the different

components of the concept of human settlements and their relationship to poverty, unemployment, natural disasters, lack of shelter and services, and the marginalization of vulnerable groups — children, women and indigenous groups. This should be done at the international, national and regional level, but especially at the local level.

We hope that by the end of this session we will have a much clearer vision of where we stand, what remains to be done and where we are going.

At the international level, our delegation, which includes representatives of civil society, would like to reiterate its commitment to the Istanbul Declaration and Agenda. We believe that both constitute a valid and viable platform for international action and cooperation.

We would like to highlight some of the results of the session of the Commission on Human Settlements that took place in Nairobi in February of this year. We believe that the establishment of a committee of permanent representatives as a subsidiary body would fill the void that has existed between sessions of the Commission and would make it possible to provide greater continuity and impetus to the work of the Commission.

A fundamental aspect noted by the Commission is the role that is, and should be, played by local authorities as immediate actors in order to ensure the implementation, in an overall and effective manner, of decentralization processes and of programmes and projects in the area of human settlements.

We also have before us the draft declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium. This declaration should provide a fresh impetus to this very necessary process, which aims to provide disadvantaged persons with the minimum conditions required in order to live in dignity.

We believe that at the international level we have an institutional and legal structure that is broad enough not only to promote but also to accelerate the implementation of the objectives of the Habitat Agenda.

We acknowledge that the primary responsibility lies with each of our countries, but within this process of globalization and increasing interdependence, there is also shared responsibility with our developed partners, on the basis of solidarity and cooperation.

This solidarity and cooperation must be expressed through the necessary transfer of financial resources to developing countries through direct investment, official development assistance, debt forgiveness, the opening up of markets, and even the establishment of special funds and the creation of new options in the international financial institutions. Without this solidarity and cooperation, it will be very difficult for our countries to comply with the Istanbul commitments.

At the national level, Bolivia is deploying tremendous efforts to comply with the commitments undertaken at Habitat II and to achieve its objectives. Bolivia has provided a comprehensive report on the implementation of its programme, which takes a comprehensive approach to housing, social development and eradication of poverty, environmental regulation, economic development, governance, international cooperation and current and future initiatives and measures.

Bolivia's new housing policy is based on the right to adequate shelter, through the participation of the people on the basis of the principles of integration, sustainability and social equity.

From an institutional standpoint, the national Government, in considering the serious housing problems facing the Bolivian population, has given ministerial status to the former Under-Secretary for Housing Affairs. He is now the Minister of Housing and Basic Services.

With this reform, the Ministry is developing a policy whose goal is to provide secure land tenure and equal access to land, credit and basic services, thereby promoting the right to adequate housing. In this respect, we have developed a strategy that is based on two pillars: a national housing subsidy programme and a financial market for housing.

The first pillar consists of four subprogrammes. The first is the improvement of neighbourhoods in order to enhance living and sanitary conditions for low-income households in cities with more than 8,000 inhabitants. The subsidy covers 70 per cent, and the other 30 per cent comes from local contributions.

The second subprogramme is the reconstruction of housing units in urban areas in cities that have been affected by earthquakes and fires. Early this year

Bolivia also experienced devastating floods, which destroyed houses in poor communities.

A third subprogramme is aimed at making improvements in areas affected by endemic diseases, such as Chagas' disease, in the southern and south-eastern part of the country. The fourth is a direct-subsidy subprogramme involving two components: a subsidy of $2,500 for the purchase of housing, with a contribution of $350, and another subsidy of $800, with a private contribution of $100, to improve and to expand existing housing.

The financial programme for housing is based on the establishment of a unified system for land registry and property rights and on the creation of a real estate market.

In other areas, Bolivia, within the framework of human settlements, is tackling problems related to social development and the eradication of poverty as a priority for the national Government, through the creation of more jobs, taking into account the protection of the environment, water supply and demand, and reduction of pollution in urban areas.

These policies are reflected in a series of laws such as the Environmental Act, the Forest Act, the Popular Participation Act and the National Service for Agrarian Reform Act.

We are currently drawing up legal instruments related to land planning, urban registry, rural registry, and laws on housing and urbanization.

Allow me to conclude by stating that all of these programmes and efforts may not be adequately implemented if developing countries do not enjoy the cooperation and solidarity of the international community.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Al-Douri, Chairman of the delegation of Iraq.

Mr. Al-Douri (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to congratulate Mr. Harri Holkeri on his election as President of this twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly, and we also congratulate his colleagues, the members of the Bureau. We wish them great success.

Iraq's policy on the improvement of urban settlements and urban centres evolved successfully in the 1970s and 1980s, when the State created a number of organizations and foundations for urban planning and urban communities. It also made large investments to ensure housing for large sectors of the population by the end of the year 2000.

Within the span of a few years, we were able to build housing units as well as infrastructure projects. Unfortunately, the Iraqi housing sector has been affected by external pressure — the aggression carried out by the coalition led by the United States in 1991. That aggression affected most of our infrastructure, factories, power plants, schools, public buildings, dams, bridges and roads, mosques, churches, hospitals, as well as shelters for citizens. Weapons of mass destruction were used, such as depleted uranium, which led to the very serious pollution of our urban areas and harmed the health of our citizens. This resulted in massive destruction and many deaths, not to mention the various diseases that spread like wildfire. Later, an embargo was imposed on Iraq in an unprecedented manner, yet we continue to comply with the guidelines of the Habitat Agenda.

With the limits of the precarious conditions under which we live, we have enacted laws affecting the property structure of the country and which assist the most vulnerable sectors of the population at minimal cost, with concessional credit.

Despite the embargo that has been imposed on our country, Iraq has also taken many steps in social integration policy to reinforce the role and place of women in society and to ensure job opportunities that are suited to their qualifications and social needs. We should also point out along these lines the fact that Iraq has encouraged joint projects between the public and private sectors, strengthening decentralization, local communities and urban centres. This is how local communities have made an effective contribution to land management and to planning.

However, these measures are insufficient and cannot satisfy all our needs as expressed in the Habitat Agenda, especially since Iraq is still deprived of access to its own resources and is still subjected to an overall embargo, not to mention the daily air raids that are carried out by British and American aircraft.

How can we consider the possibility of promoting urbanization, developing our towns and ensuring sustainable development in these circumstances? The only viable answer would be to lift the harmful embargo that has lasted for more than 10 years,

especially since it has lost its raison d'être. This is the only way to resolve the problems that we face. So from this podium we call upon the international community to work seriously to immediately and unconditionally lift the embargo.

Iraq would like to make all sincere efforts to comply with the principles of the Habitat Agenda, and along these lines we affirm: first, the need to put an end to any kind of action against countries for reasons and goals that serve the interests and political and economic hegemonic powers of some big countries. Secondly, the need to strengthen international efforts to determine the scope of destruction and pollution as a result of the use of depleted uranium by the United States against certain countries, including Iraq. Thirdly, while supporting the principle of decentralization in the area of urbanization and of strengthening local communities, we are nonetheless opposed to the use of this principle to impose on developing States a particular form of management. Fourthly, trade liberalization and globalization agreements allow developed countries to impose their power on global trade and the transfer of technology. Fifthly, developed countries must support the commitments that they undertook at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

In conclusion, Palestinian towns occupied by the Zionist entity are destroyed daily and face expropriation. The influx of Jewish people into that area and the proliferation of Jewish settlements go against all international laws and norms and the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. The Palestinian population faces all kinds of coercion and daily aggression. The international community is called upon to strongly intervene in order to put an end to this aggression, to restore the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, to restore land to its rightful owners and to rehabilitate Palestinian towns, and to condemn all forms of aggression perpetrated by the Zionist entity in the Golan Heights and in certain other areas of southern Lebanon.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Om Pradhan, Chairman of the delegation of Bhutan.

Mr. Pradhan (Bhutan): As speakers before me have stressed, the challenges of "adequate shelter for all" and "sustainable urban development" have intensified since the Istanbul Conference. Globalization has fuelled urbanization at a rapid pace. Many Governments and cities face enormous pressure to provide even basic services to ever increasing urban populations.

This special session affords us an important opportunity to take stock of the progress that has been made so far in implementing the Habitat Agenda, as well as to evaluate the obstacles that have been encountered and to consider a viable course of action.

Shelter is obviously one of the most basic of human needs. Hence, it is important that Governments and the international community continue to accord human settlements a high priority.

In this context, it is pertinent to mention that the challenges of human settlements are compounded not only by rural-to-urban migrations within national boundaries, but also by trans-border migrations, sometimes on a massive scale, of destitute people in search of better livelihoods and living space. This is a prominent feature in our region of South Asia, where one fifth of the world's population lives and where poverty is rampant. Therefore, it is imperative that in order to implement the Habitat Agenda successfully, national efforts must be complemented by international cooperation.

One of the main constraints in implementing the Habitat Agenda in the developing countries, and more so in the least developed among them, is the lack of technical know-how and other resources. This problem has to be addressed seriously, in the context of both official development assistance and concessional financing mechanisms. The International Conference on Financing for Development to be held next year in Mexico will have a good opportunity to look at this issue.

As far as my country Bhutan is concerned, 20 per cent of our population live in urban areas. However, it is expected that within the next two decades, our urban population will increase to over 50 per cent, making it a big challenge for a small country like ours.

The Government's objective is to "achieve a balanced and sustainable development of human settlements, provision of basic infrastructure, conservation of environmental character and culture, and provision of affordable and climatically suitable housing for all".

In keeping with our people-centred socio-economic development policies, the Government provides assistance to all house owners, especially in the rural areas, by way of subsidized timber and group fire insurance. Every possible effort is being made to ensure sanitation, water supply and, where feasible, provision of electricity. Furthermore, in order to overcome the shortage of housing in urban areas, the Government and financial institutions have joined hands to create appropriate affordable housing, wherever feasible.

One of the key national policy objectives that we have been implementing over the last 25 years is decentralization, which takes socio-economic activities right down to the town and village levels. This process has had a positive impact on environmental management, housing, sanitation, water supply, electricity, health and education facilities. It is in this context and in order to ensure that urban planning caters to an expanding population that the Municipal Act of 1999 was also passed by our National Assembly.

In order to give further impetus to human settlements and improve sustainability of urban services, Bhutan has established the National Committee on Human Settlements to look after all aspects in this regard.

In conclusion, my delegation is confident that, given the national and international will and cooperation, our work here at this special session will contribute to making our world a better place for all.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Rodrigo Biazon, Chairman of the delegation of the Philippines.

Mr. Biazon (Philippines): At the outset, I congratulate the President and the other members of the Bureau on their election. They may rest assured that my delegation will fully support them in the work ahead of us.

The Philippine Government reaffirms its support of the Habitat Agenda on the provision of adequate shelter for all and the promotion of sustainable development. The right to adequate shelter is enshrined in the Philippine constitution. In translating this mandate into concrete initiatives and measures, the Philippine Government has forged linkages with civil society, the private sector and academia in order to realize the Government's philosophy of building on the initiatives and capabilities of the people while making them partners in development. Beyond paying lip service to the Habitat Agenda, the Philippine Government, since 1996, has installed policies and legislation to implement the Agenda.

Complementing the legislature's efforts, the executive branch has implemented measures to curtail the activities of professional squatters and squatting syndicates and to enhance the comprehensive land-use plans of local government units. This includes reform of the National Urban Development and Housing Framework 1999-2004. The Philippine Government has also implemented programmes to provide security of tenure and to regularize informal settlers occupying public lands. Taking note of the housing requirements of the formal sector, the Philippine Government also established a home lending programme with fund contributions coming from the social security institutions and from other government financial institutions.

There have been many impediments to the provision of adequate shelter to the Filipino people. These include governance problems, the effects of El Niño and La Niña, the Asian financial crisis and the continuous process of rapid urbanization. The Philippines has one of the highest levels of urbanization among Asian countries, estimated recently at 52 per cent as against 48.6 per cent in 1990.

My country's entry into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) has further exacerbated our urban problems. The Uruguay Round of trade negotiations was expected to bring tangible benefits to my country in the form of improved market access, increased commodity prices through the reduction or elimination of trade-distorting domestic supports and subsidies to agriculture, and a more efficient allocation of resources in agriculture and other sectors. However, that optimism has yet to be justified. Our agricultural sector, wanting as it is in government assistance through land reform, farm-to-market roads, irrigation facilities, sufficient credit, high-quality seed and far greater capital, has yet to benefit from our country's accession to the GATT-WTO. Our farmers' produce cannot compete against the developed countries' subsidized products. Owing to the reduced earnings of Filipino farmers and limited employment opportunities in rural areas, the Philippines has experienced an exodus from the countryside to urban centres. Our

farmers, ironically, are slowly being driven to search for greener pastures in the asphalt jungles of the cities.

As expected, this increasing migration has magnified other urban problems, including traffic congestion, difficulties with urban administration and management, and the lack of employment opportunities. Nevertheless, our country affirms its commitment to resolving these problems. In the next four years, our country's human settlements institutions will continue to establish programmes for the provision of adequate shelter and the promotion of sustainable development by pursuing the enactment of laws to strengthen the policy environment and to facilitate the implementation of strategies to provide adequate shelter for our people.

In the interest of improving international cooperation, we urge the international community to extend support in the following areas. First, we urge a review of the impact of the GATT-WTO on developing countries, especially on their agricultural sector. This merely reiterates what our heads of State or Government concluded at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development. We must strive for the elimination and prohibition of export subsidies, which come in many forms; improved market access for developing countries through tariff reductions; and the elimination of tariff peaks and tariff escalation on products of interest to developing countries. In essence, we must ensure that the international trading system, especially in areas of particular interest to developing countries, is fair, bound by regulations and rule-based to enable developing countries effectively to address their development goals, including non-trade concerns such as shelter and food security, which should not be confused with the issue of food safety.

Secondly, those developed countries that have not yet done so should be urged to meet the target of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product for overall official development assistance.

Thirdly, we urge support for the social development goals of the Millennium Declaration.

We are optimistic that this special session will serve as a venue for Member countries to exchange ideas on issues affecting the provision of adequate shelter and sustainable development. Let us take this opportunity to forge a consensus, address the housing problem and formulate viable solutions in our fight against poverty.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sélim Tadmoury, Chairman of the delegation of Lebanon.

Mr. Tadmoury (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation is particularly pleased to be participating in the work of this special session for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). Because the session is taking place at the beginning of the third millennium, we must be careful to make an accurate appraisal of what has been achieved in terms of the Habitat Agenda and to consider the outlook for the future.

I must observe that the documents before the Assembly have been of considerable help in that connection. Let me highlight the report of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (A/S-25/2). That report is characterized by transparency, and it objectively describes what is taking place on the regional and international levels; it addresses the question of removing obstacles that have prevented us from implementing the Habitat Agenda.

On the basis of a study of national reports and of the outcome of regional meetings held since 1996, we can affirm that the results have been positive and that we are prepared to implement the goals of the Habitat Agenda.

We would point in particular to adequate shelter and the sustainable development of human settlements in all forms, not to mention the achievements that have been made in security of tenure and urban governance, in implementation of the resolutions of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

The subject before us is part of a complex whole that includes problems of social and economic development, environment, poverty eradication, urban planning, rural exodus to cities and globalization. The second millennium saw an impressive number of meetings and conferences that emphasized studies. In the third millennium, we need to move to real implementation and efforts to establish human settlements adapted to modern needs. It might be difficult to discuss all the aspects of the problem of human settlements here today, but in the context of this

session it is very important to stress certain points of concern to my delegation.

First and foremost is globalization. This phenomenon was the subject of discussion at the Millennium Summit and is having a real impact on human settlements at a time when cities offer access to technology and exchanges of ideas, goods and human contact. Globalization has left a huge gap between the strongest, who have grown richer, and the weakest, who have been stripped of opportunity. In spite of this, strong and weak alike are paying the price of globalization on an equal footing.

It is important to see the influence of globalization on large metropolitan areas, especially in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. In the countries of those regions, we can identify two separate strata, one adapted to and benefiting from globalization and the other losing ground. It is up to the Members of this Organization to mitigate the negative impact of globalization on human settlements, to redistribute its costs and to eliminate poverty. Globalization has engendered hotspots of poverty and shantytowns throughout the world, as well as violence and social imbalances.

Solving the problem of urban poverty and human settlements should be a focus of the private and public sectors alike, as well as of the institutions of civil society. We would suggest the establishment of an international fund under United Nations auspices that could help eradicate poverty and halve its incidence by 2015. This would involve an important contribution from local authorities. The development of municipalities and democratic institutions will promote good governance and have a positive impact on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. It is also important to note that legal infrastructures must be adapted to allow us to achieve our goals for human settlements. Ownership laws must be overhauled and a financial system encouraging low-interest, long-term loans must be secured.

As to human settlements, it is very important to point out the need to protect the demographic composition and cultures of occupied territories. It is unjust to transfer inhabitants from their homes. We need to respect international humanitarian law, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Israel must abide by the provisions of that treaty in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Golan Heights. Israel, the occupying Power, should respect legitimate international resolutions in order to establish a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

My country suffered a great deal from Israel's occupation of its southern region for 22 years. Israel destroyed a large number of human settlements and other sectors of the country also saw the destruction of their infrastructure over the course of 15 years. In 10 years, my country has achieved a great deal and has reconstructed its towns, especially the capital, Beirut, taking into account the need for balance between the environment and human needs. We have also enhanced the legal system and are working to establish urbanization projects in the northern and southern suburbs of Beirut and to rehabilitate human settlements in the southern part of the country. We appeal for the support of the international financial institutions and of donor countries for these projects, which will further our objectives with respect to human settlements. We need a minimum of international cooperation.

My delegation feels that the draft declaration on towns and human settlements in the context of the new millennium represents an important step forward. We support the United Nations in its local, regional and international efforts to establish the necessary conditions for viable human settlements, allowing modern humankind to focus its energy on creating a better world.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Dirk Jan van den Berg, Chairman of the delegation of the Netherlands.

Mr. Van den Berg (Netherlands): It is an honour and privilege for me to address the Assembly at this special session on behalf of the delegation of the Netherlands.

Reports prepared for this special session clearly indicate that we are still far away from the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Therefore, Istanbul+5 offers us no time for complacency. On the contrary, there is an urgent need to focus on what still has to be done. The two flagship reports presented to this session are the *Global Report on Human Settlements* and the *State of the World's Cities* report for 2001.

These reports clearly set out the formidable tasks ahead. They are indispensable reading material for all those engaged in habitat policy development. We

strongly support the proposal to update these reports on a biannual basis; they are important tools for integrating the habitat dimension in the work of Governments and of international organizations. The Habitat Agenda should be fed into the work of the United Nations funds and agencies on a continuing basis. We simply cannot afford to discuss these issues at a five-year interval cycle. The urgency of the matter is reflected in the support at last year's Millennium Summit for the Cities without Slums initiative. This clearly signals awareness of the Habitat challenges at the highest level.

The two flagship reports and the documentation presented to this special session by the Executive Director of Habitat present us with strong arguments that sound Habitat policies should be cross-cutting and inclusive: not just shelter, but also sanitation, health, sustainable construction, infrastructure, spatial planning and integrated urban development. This calls for a comprehensive approach at the national and local levels. This comprehensive approach must also be reflected in our policies on international cooperation.

Implementation is not a top/down issue. National Governments have a major role to play, but they are dependent on local authorities and civil society at large. Local authorities — whether representing small or large communities — are of key significance to reaching our common habitat objectives. They should be sufficiently empowered so as to achieve good governance. I therefore welcome the commitment of the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) at its meeting in May 2001 in Rio de Janeiro to intensify its collaboration with Habitat. IULA considers the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements (UNCHS) the key link between local authorities and the United Nations system. IULA's support for the Habitat Centre Global Campaign for Secure Tenure is essential. In this context, it is interesting to mention that in many countries an encouraging trend towards increased cooperation between local authorities and the private sector has become manifest. Such public-private partnerships are providing many examples of mutual benefit.

Local, regional and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs), many of which are present at this special session, are also key players in representing the interests of citizens in relation to human settlement issues. Women and women's organizations play a decisive role in securing equal rights relating to security of rental and ownership tenure and to mortgages. However, as the flagship reports show, women seeking the implementation of these rights meet obstacles. My delegation would like to reiterate that these rights have already been acknowledged in the Habitat Agenda, and that we should increase our efforts to overcome these obstacles.

The "Declaration on Cities and other Human Settlements in the New Millennium" will hopefully be a means to further implement the Habitat Agenda. As a political document, it deserves due attention on political agendas and can also serve as an instrument to generate means for the development of shelter and human settlements. Poverty eradication in terms of habitat means that we should ultimately eliminate — and not just improve or regulate — slums and squatter settlements.

This year, the Netherlands is commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of its national housing act. We have come a long way since the beginning of the twentieth century. A lot still remains to be done. A recently published policy paper of my Government has reviewed our accomplishments and has explored possible future policy lines in terms of human settlement development. A central, recurrent notion in that policy paper is the central role of individual people, their needs and wants. Authorities and other actors must be more receptive to what various categories of consumers in the housing market actually want. For an urbanizing country like the Netherlands — more than 80 per cent of the present population lives in urban areas — it is important to involve and engage citizens and their organizations in the preparation and the execution of integrated urban regeneration plans.

Therefore, an important precondition for local governments to obtain relevant subsidies is the existence of such plans and the evident involvement of society in these plans. So, civil society — NGOs and CBOs — and democratic local authorities play a pivotal role in our urban policy. There is no advantage or time gained by cutting out their participation, neither here nor elsewhere.

An important Dutch national NGO, the Habitat Platform, is actively engaged in promoting local participation in the Netherlands. This Platform devotes

a substantial part of its resources to raising awareness of global habitat issues. This is one example of how we in the Netherlands are implementing the Habitat Agenda. The national report on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda since Istanbul will give you further information. It is being distributed at this special session.

We hope that we can discuss the Habitat Agenda implementation on a regular basis. Let us work towards concrete and tangible results. Let us make sure that the biannual update of the flagship reports will show us encouraging progress. In short, let us reinvigorate the Habitat spirit.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to Mr. Mikhail Wehbe, head of the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are meeting today at United Nations Headquarters at the start of the new millennium to review comprehensively the goals implemented and adopted at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in Istanbul in 1996. We are also meeting to evaluate the effectiveness of the efforts made in our countries with a view to achieving universal population development.

Shelter is a basic need in man's life. On this basis, various Governments accord this question special attention. They develop plans designed to ensure healthy housing units with enough land to absorb an increasing population, as well as appropriate and varied building materials, in addition to providing services and facilities to housing areas.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic is making great efforts to achieve all the goals it has set and plans to fulfil its responsibilities in this regard. Syrian law guarantees housing rights. It also contains provisions against eviction and the stripping of ownership. There are no barriers in Syria preventing women from possessing housing or land, and no barriers preventing them from acquiring mortgages in their names. There are also no barriers to women's inheritance of land.

The Syrian Arab Republic enjoys an advanced system of ownership rights and a legal system for renting land and developing housing. Our residential policies include development trends designed to achieve optimum benefits from water resources and provide basic services to the majority of the population.

This is in addition to safeguarding housing for the various social groupings, with the participation and the contribution of the private, public and cooperative sectors, in order to cope with the natural growth of population and to counter the accompanying effects of rapid urbanization and the results of emigration from the countryside to the cities.

Our development strategies are designed to divide up residential areas in a fair way and to improve standards of living in both rural and urban areas, as well as to close gaps in the provision of services and reduce migration to urban centres, thereby minimizing the problems associated with cities and with the establishment of random communities in their vicinity.

The management of human settlements is the responsibility of local councils, down to the village level, which deal with conditions in each town and village, setting out plans to enhance their development in keeping with the conditions and requirements of each residential community.

Enhancing international cooperation is an important step towards resolving the housing problem. This requires national efforts, as well as an appropriate external environment and effective international cooperation. Improving conditions in human settlements in developing countries is an important step towards improving their standing at the international level. We believe that developed countries have a duty to demonstrate the necessary political will to create an appropriate international environment for the social and economic development of developing countries. Developed countries must also respect and implement their commitments in the field of international cooperation through the guaranteeing of financial resources, the transfer of technology, debt cancellation and the opening of international markets. Such measures would enhance the ability of developing countries to deal with the problems of human settlements.

In considering the improvement of conditions in human settlements, we should not be distracted from focusing on the problems to which such settlements are being subjected as a result of war and conflicts and natural disasters in several parts of the world. During our meetings, many delegations have referred to the suffering of their peoples as a result of such factors. In

the Middle East, the destruction of human settlements and the environment and the deprivation of the right of the Arabs to benefit from them is a systematic policy pursued by Israel through its occupation of Arab territories in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine.

The world witnessed this during the visit of His Holiness John Paul II to the city of Quneitra, which was completely destroyed by Israel before it pulled out in 1974. The city remains as it was left, a witness to the brutality of the Israeli occupation and Israel's lack of respect for international values, treaties and conventions, to say nothing of the principles of international humanitarian law. After occupying the Syrian Golan in 1967, Israel, persistent in its defiance of international legitimacy and the Geneva Conventions, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, evicted the Syrian population. At that time the population was 130,000; it is now 500,000. Israel evicted them from 244 cities, villages and farms, which it then destroyed.

Israel built or is finishing about 40 settlements in place of the towns and villages that it destroyed. When the Syrian citizens who were not evicted by Israel try to build new houses, Israel cuts off the water and electricity supply, in preparation for destroying those dwellings on the pretext that they have no building permits — but they have no such permits because Israel refuses to grant them.

Israel continues to defy Security Council resolution 497 (1981) of 17 December 1981, which calls upon it to rescind its decision to annex the Syrian Golan and refrain from changing its geographic and demographic nature. This is also the case with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which call upon Israel to fully withdraw from all occupied Arab territories. Israel also flouts and rejects General Assembly resolutions relating to the occupied Syrian Golan.

The destruction of houses in the Palestinian occupied territories has become a systematic policy pursued by Israel. They are a direct target for its planes, tanks, guns and bulldozers. Israel does not hesitate to perpetrate such acts, which run counter to all international norms and values. Instead, it invents pretexts to justify such practices. Tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza strip and Jerusalem have been displaced by Israel; they have been evicted from their homes and their houses have been destroyed. This is taking place in Jerusalem for reasons that are well known, the most significant of which is the attempt to Judaize that Arab city. Today, there are more than 200 Israeli colonies in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. The Israeli Government announces daily the establishment of new colonies — despite the peace process, and despite the condemnation levelled at it by the international community for these abominable practices.

In this connection, we would like to refer to Security Council resolutions 446 (1979) and 465 (1980). They state that such settlement activities are illegal and unlawful. They also state that settlement activities pose a danger to the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In addition, such settlement activities curb the growth of local Palestinian communities, and this in turn has social and economic repercussions on the citizens of Palestine and the occupied Syrian Golan, as stated time and again by the General Assembly in many of its resolutions.

The current Israeli Government is trying to consolidate its position and entrench its policy by building more settlements and expanding those that already exist in accordance with the policy declared by Sharon to strengthen settlement activities — activities that are internationally rejected.

Allow me, in conclusion, to express our appreciation for the efforts made by the Commission on Human Settlements to prepare for this special session. Rest assured that the Syrian delegation will cooperate with the President to make this important session a success.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Roland Kpotsra, Chairman of the delegation of Togo.

Mr. Kpotsra (Togo) (*spoke in French*): The century that has just come to a close was marked not only by considerable scientific and technological progress, but also by unbridled urbanization, which, by all appearances, will continue at an even more accelerated pace in the years to come. A sign of development, this urbanization is unfortunately accompanied by many problems that are very difficult to resolve and that may well be harmful to our societies if effective and urgent measures are not taken to minimize their effects.

Indeed, half of the more than 6 billion people on the planet live in cities today, as compared to only 29 per cent in the middle of the last century. According to projections, this growth of the urban population will be even greater in the developing countries, where problems related particularly to the rural exodus, housing, access to basic services, employment and the environment are intensifying. In a number of cities in the developing countries, the poor functioning of city administrations, the collapsing infrastructure and the rise in violence and crime have had negative effects on economic growth, the quality of life and working conditions. Other factors, such as the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS and increased poverty have only further exacerbated the already precarious socio-economic situation in the developing world, in particular in Africa.

The international community continues to face these many challenges in particular by holding major international conferences, including the Istanbul Habitat Conference, the implementation of whose decisions we are here reviewing and evaluating. In order to remedy the disturbing situation, the international community has committed itself to taking action at all levels to combat the deterioration in quality of life through the harmonious development of human settlements and by combating unemployment, poverty and environmental degradation. Hence, the Habitat Agenda, the implementation of which we are now evaluating, recommended mobilizing adequate financial resources at all levels, including new and additional multinational, bilateral, public and private resources to improve the living conditions of hundreds of millions of poor and inadequately sheltered people throughout the world.

Despite the socio-economic crisis that has shaken the country during recent years and the economic recession that has affected the harmonious development of human settlements, the Togolese authorities have, in implementing this Agenda, undertaken actions aimed at achieving a sustainable improvement in the nature and quality of life of our people. Thus, we have translated into action the commitments made in Istanbul.

In this regard, it is worth noting that we adopted in 1998 a law on decentralization, a national population policy and a national policy on the environment, and in 2001 a national urban policy declaration. In addition, a national housing strategy is now being drafted. It is also worth noting that in Togo all interested partners — parliamentarians, researchers, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, associations and the private sector — have been closely involved in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Without a doubt this Agenda can be fully implemented only if the international community provides suitable support for these national measures.

Allow me from this rostrum to pay a well-deserved tribute to all of our partners who have steadfastly remained with us during these difficult periods our country has been going through. We particularly welcome the ever-growing role being played by the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, to ensure that everywhere in the world human settlements will be increasingly viable and will promote social integration.

Despite the progress that has been achieved in implementing the Habitat Agenda, we must recognize that a number of obstacles continue to hinder its full implementation. This is why, at the dawn of this new millennium, it is up to the international community to work resolutely to ensure the full implementation of the fundamental objectives of the Istanbul Declaration and of the Habitat Agenda: "adequate shelter for all" and "sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world". In this regard, at this time of globalization — during which solidarity and interdependence are of higher priority than ever in order to ensure the equitable development of all the world's regions — we should bear in mind the thoughts so well expressed by President John F. Kennedy:

> "If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich." (*Inaugural address, 20 January 1961*)

The Acting President: I give the floor to Ms. Irene Wiese-von Ofen, President of the Habitat Professionals Forum.

Ms. Wiese-von Ofen (Habitat Professionals Forum): Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Habitat Professionals Forum. The Habitat Professionals Forum was established in 1999 at the initiative of the International Federation for Housing and Planning, the International Union of Architects, the International Federation of Surveyors, the International Society of City and Regional Planners, the Centre for African Settlement Studies and

Development and the Arab Urban Development Institute. The Forum was organized under the auspices of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat).

The word forum means a platform, a place where information is brought in order to communicate with others. The Habitat Professionals Forum is not a club with members nor an organization with statutes, but a partnership of sovereign organizations and institutes working together to address worldwide problems related to population increase and homelessness, planning, housing and human settlements. The Forum is open to other international non-governmental organizations that work on topics related to the Habitat Agenda. The Forum can help to establish networks and to share knowledge and experiences.

The awareness of different governmental levels and their action is essential for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. But in addition to these governmental commitments, civil society should take into consideration that the implementation of the principles of sustainability is a continuous learning process.

Learning needs to occur on different levels of overlapping non-governmental fields of training and cooperation in order to transform our current way of life into a more sustainable one. Non-governmental organizations, acting as mediators, can use their commitment, professional talents and experience to help resolve these difficult processes laden with conflicts.

Looking at the differing speeds worldwide of technical and economical structural changes, at the more indolent and more traditional socio-political structures, and at the ecological processes with their own long-lasting laws of nature and continued evolution, one needs experts to solve these problems.

In every country, there are highly educated experts with special expertise, but they often do not have enough experience or the support of their local authorities and are not part of an international network that helps to exchange ideas and innovative approaches. Therefore, the challenge is to provide training for better interdisciplinary and intergovernmental cooperation. The Habitat Professionals Forum, related to the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS), addresses this challenge by offering a platform for professionals to meet one another, just as we have been doing in free workshops during the days of this special session.

Knowledge and expertise in the various disciplines — urban and regional planning, traffic and transportation planning, architecture and ecology, sociology and law, health and culture, sciences and economy, statistics and geographic information, and surveying and land administration — are the preconditions for solving the problems of human settlements on the technical side of this tremendous task. In order to address the human side of the task, "shelter for all", we need participation of the people — families, women, children — as well as of companies, firms, institutions, enterprises and so on. Any change in physical structure leads to a change in social composition. Contemporary architecture must respond with precision to social requirements, and architectural beauty needs to be an important defining factor of the cities in which we live. Without sound land administration there is no sustainable solution to housing problems.

Professional experts are ready to add their expertise and knowledge to the pool of experience in the following ways: to organize forums together with UNCHS to exchange the best practices; to organize national forums upon invitation from local governments; to include the principles of the Habitat Agenda in educational curricula and research agendas; to help mediate between investors and inhabitants, if we are asked to do so; to give recommendations to Governments in order to establish partnerships and to achieve quality in architecture and urban planning, construction, and land registration and management; and to work worldwide towards an integrated social and technical approach to addressing the problems of human settlements.

In the interest of time, we ask the Assembly to take the opportunity to read what we have offered in our longer written statement.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Mr. Ernesto Gil Elorduy, President of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat.

Mr. Elorduy (Global Parliamentarians on Habitat) (*spoke in Spanish*): I welcome those who have made the strengthening of peace, international cooperation and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms the principal reason for their moral commitment. I share the conviction that peace is

built on social equity and on the progress of our peoples.

It is a great honour for me, as a Mexican senator, to take the floor in the plenary of the General Assembly of the United Nations on behalf of and as the representative of Global Parliamentarians on Habitat. This great distinction is evidence of the Assembly's interest in listening to the views of legislators.

We wish to express our heartfelt thanks to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, Ms. Anna Tibaijuka.

The dawn of the new millennium leads us to reflect on the future of our societies in the face of globalization, a commitment to which all States, Governments and parliaments must rise as a moral imperative of human existence and values. Parliamentarians promote government actions based on norms of civilized conduct that comprise a legislative framework which gives legality to and supports the processes of development and the links between people and their political representatives. Because of their constitutional origins, democratic character and national responsibility, congresses and parliaments must be present in building the new international order. We are a genuine product of democracy, which we understand to mean a system of living that is based on steady improvement in the economic, social and cultural lives of the people.

Since its creation at the Yokohama meeting in 1987, Global Parliamentarians on Habitat has sought to promote the sustainable development of human settlements and the goal of adequate shelter for all. This decision was both correct and timely. The participation of parliaments in the international agenda is of the utmost importance.

The United Nations, by its very nature, adopts a more global perspective on issues. This is, therefore, the forum that must create greater public awareness of the major global issues and challenges that we face. On the other hand, the very essence of parliamentary representation is direct and immediate involvement in policy at the social and local levels. Communication between these two worlds — cooperation between the United Nations system and legislative bodies — is therefore becoming increasingly necessary.

We welcome the decision to create the legal entity of the Habitat centre, and we are confident that coordination with the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat can be ensured in order to provide legal assistance to the countries that request it. The global group will support the implementation of the programme of work of the Habitat centre for the period 2001-2002, as it relates to the issuance of juridical ordinances that provide for secure land tenure in the context of an accelerated process of urbanization to promote good urban governance and safer cities.

There is a need for committed action on the part of parliaments to reinforce and reassess legislative action as an essential part of the democratic process, sustainable development, protection of the environment and the fight against poverty. We propose that groups similar to Global Parliamentarians on Habitat might be formed to assist — with their political experience, their legislative powers and democratic legitimacy — in other programmes and actions that the United Nations might consider appropriate and to provide a legal framework for addressing the various problems faced by the countries of our world.

The United Nations has opened its doors to legislators on an important item on its agenda — namely, Habitat. It is not idle to recall that the commitments and changes that are being proposed for achieving the goals of this Agenda will have more strength and better direction with the support of parliaments. The future can be achieved and guaranteed only through the law. To those who still believe that the law is not everything, we say that without good laws, everything is nothing.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this meeting.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.